China-Central Asia Summit
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CHINA DAILY

FRIDAY, May 19, 2023 中国日报 chinadaily.com.cn RMB **¥2**

President Xi Jinping (center) and his wife, Peng Liyuan, pose for a photo with visiting leaders of five Central Asian countries and first ladies of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, on Thursday, during a welcoming ceremony. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

Visiting leaders get grand welcome

Xi notes that extraordinary journey of friendship began 2,000-plus years ago

By XU WEI in Xi'an
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President Xi Jinping and his wife, Peng Liyuan, offered the heads of state from the five Central Asian countries a grand welcoming ceremony teeming with cultural elements of the Tang Dynasty (618-907) in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, on Thursday evening.

A performance featuring the splendor of the Tang culture was displayed as Xi and Peng welcomed the five presidents and the first ladies of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in Xi'an, which was China's capital during the Tang Dynasty, for the China-Central Asia Summit.

In front of the Ziyun Pavilion in Tang Paradise, a theme park with the architectural style of a Tang royal garden, dancers wearing Tang costumes offered the leaders a feast for the eyes and the ears, with a splendid performance that featured radiant lights, drumbeats and the reading of poems.

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When addressing a welcoming banquet for the heads of state after the ceremony, Xi noted that Shaanxi, which was the starting point of the ancient Silk Road, witnessed the profound friendship between China and Central Asian countries over the past 2,000-plus years.

Since the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two sides, China and Central Asian countries have gone through an extraordinary journey and secured achievements that attracted worldwide attention, he said.

Dancers wearing Tang costumes perform during the welcoming ceremony. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

The two sides have always respected each other, upheld good neighborliness, stood in solidarity and sought win-win outcomes despite all the changes in the international landscape, Xi said. State-to-state relations have made a historic leap from good neighborliness to strategic partnership and to a community with a shared future, he added.

He underscored that the deepening of ties between China and Central Asia is a strategic choice made by the leaders while eyeing the future, which is also in keeping with major trends of the world and the aspirations of the people.

Xi expressed his belief that the summit on Friday will be a success and usher in a new era for China-Central Asia relations.

Xi concluded by saying that China sincerely welcomes Central Asian countries in exploring opportunities from China's development and jointly working toward a brighter future for bilateral cooperation.

After the banquet, the leaders watched a performance by dancers and singers that also marked the launching ceremony of the Year of Culture and Art of the Peoples of China and Central Asia and the China-Central Asia Youth Arts Festival.

Envoy: Talks, building trust key to ending Ukraine crisis

By ZHOU JIN
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China has reaffirmed its stance on a political settlement of the Ukraine crisis and called on various parties to create the conditions for a cease-fire and peace talks, as its special representative on Eurasian affairs Li Hui wrapped up his visit to Kyiv on Wednesday.

During his two-day visit, Li held separate talks with President Volodymyr Zelensky, Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba and other senior Ukrainian officials.

The two sides agreed to work together to continue the tradition of mutual respect and advance mutually beneficial cooperation.

Li's visit came three weeks after President Xi Jinping told Zelensky that China would send an envoy to Kyiv, during their first telephone conversation since the outbreak of the conflict. Li will also visit Poland, France, Germany and Russia.

"There is no panacea for resolving the crisis. All parties need to do their part to build up mutual trust and create conditions for peace talks and ending the conflict," a Foreign Ministry statement quoted Li as saying.

Li said that China would like to encourage the international community to find the broadest common understanding on the settlement of the Ukraine crisis, and make its contribution to restoring peace.

China has always played a constructive role in alleviating the humanitarian situation in Ukraine in its own way and will continue to provide assistance to the country within its capacity, Li added.

According to the statement, the Ukrainian side said that it attaches great importance to China's role in international affairs as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, and welcomes Beijing playing an active role in pushing for ending hostilities and restoring peace.

Ukraine always adheres to the one-China principle and is willing to work together with China to promote the continued and greater development of bilateral relations, the statement said.

On Thursday, in response to the expansion of NATO during the Ukraine crisis, Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said at a news conference that Ukraine should not be turned into the frontier in major power confrontation.

"Under current circumstances, all sides need to remain calm, exercise restraint, and avoid taking any action that might further escalate or complicate the crisis," he added.

Xu Poling, director of the Department of Russian Economy at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Russian, Eastern European and Central Asian Studies, said that Li's visit is an example of China's peaceful diplomacy, demonstrating Beijing's consistent commitment to the peaceful solution of the Ukraine crisis.

It is not so easy to achieve peace but there is always hope, Xu said.

PATH TO MODERNIZATION | SHANGHAI

CITY REMAINS MAGNET FOR FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Systemic innovation in metropolis attracts multinationals

Editor's note: *In a series of reports, China Daily explores the pursuit of high-quality development nationwide.*

indepth

By SHI JING and **LIN SHUJUAN**
in Shanghai

French banking group BNP Paribas' confidence in the Chinese market has remained undeterred by global market volatility and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The group's continued investment is proof of this. It has placed 5.3 billion yuan ($753 million) of additional equity in its China joint ventures over the past 18 months. It expects to make a further investment of 1.5 billion to 2 billion yuan in the next 12 months.

Bruno Weill, the bank's vice-chairman in China, said that in the next two months, BNP Paribas will unveil a wealth management joint venture with Agriculture Bank of China.

The company has founded 11 joint ventures with Chinese partners, including State-owned enterprises, privately owned companies and financial institutions.

The presence of foreign asset management companies, or financial institutions in a broad sense, is nothing new to Shanghai.

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Qu Yingpu

Shen Lei

Wei Qing

Yan Hua

Pierre Pakey

Fu Xiaolan

Minh Thao Chan

Greater efforts urged to give AI full play

By FAN FEIFEI and **LIU YUKUN**

As the next generation of artificial intelligence technology is expected to play a positive role in improving human well-being, greater efforts should be made to give full play to the role of emerging intelligent technology to empower high-quality economic development and ensure the safe and responsible use of AI, according to speakers at the latest Vision China event on Thursday.

Qu Yingpu, publisher and editor-in-chief of China Daily, called for efforts to nurture new drivers of economic growth in the post-pandemic era, create an open, fair, just and nondiscriminatory environment for scientific and technological development, and work hard to eliminate "gaps" and "barriers".

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The purpose of such moves is to promote balanced, coordinated and inclusive global development while enabling people of all countries to better share the fruits of development, Qu said.

"We should work together to improve global governance on science and technology, build a balanced, effective and sustainable security architecture, and let intelligent technology evolve in the right direction to provide a strong pillar for global security," Qu said at the event.

He also stressed the need to further tap into the potential of intelligent technology and explore scenario-based, smart applications of cutting-edge technology, in order to build new platforms for dialogue among civilizations and cross-cultural communication, and make greater contributions to cultural blending and people-to-people exchanges across the globe.

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Nation gets new financial regulator
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国内统一编号：CN11-0091
国际标准编号：ISSN0253-9543
邮发代号:1-3

ANN Asia News Network
A member of the Asia News Network

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Vol.43 — No. 13419

VISIT…

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CHINA-CENTRAL ASIA SUMMIT

China, Central Asia ties grow stronger

Two sides have made historic achievements in connectivity, trade and policy coordination

By **REN QI** in Almaty, Kazakhstan
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Containers are transferred at the China-Kazakhstan International Logistics Base in Lianyungang, Jiangsu province, on Nov 25, 2022.
WANG JIANMIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

More than 2,100 years ago, Zhang Qian set off from what is now the northwestern Chinese city of Xi'an as an envoy of the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220). He braved a world of uncertainties and traveled westward through harsh terrain to Central Asia.

Central Asia is where the Belt and Road Initiative began, as in a speech delivered at Kazakhstan's Nazarbayev University on Sept 7, 2013, President Xi Jinping for the first time proposed building the Silk Road Economic Belt.

Over the past decade, under the strategic guidance of Xi and the heads of state of the five Central Asian countries, the two sides have made a series of historic and groundbreaking achievements in cooperation.

In January last year, a virtual summit was held to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Central Asian countries, and China-Central Asia cooperation mechanisms were created.

In September last year, Xi attended the 22nd meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in the city of Samarkand in Uzbekistan, and paid state visits to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

In the past 10 years, the five Central Asian countries have taken an active role in the BRI, turning Central Asia into a demonstration zone for Belt and Road cooperation.

China and the Central Asian countries have strengthened the synergy of their development strategies and actively promoted policy coordination, connectivity in infrastructure and facilities, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people bonds.

Kazakhstan

President Xi and Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev agreed in February last year to work together to create another 30-year golden period of China-Kazakhstan relations, which has charted the course for the long-term development of bilateral ties.

Kazakhstan stands ready to work with China to faithfully implement the important consensus reached by the two heads of state and usher in a new golden 30 years of bilateral relations, Kazakh Foreign Minister Mukhtar Tleuberdi said, adding that Kazakhstan has introduced a 14-day visa-free policy for Chinese citizens and looks forward to further facilitating people-to-people exchanges and deepening sub-national exchanges and cooperation.

China-Europe freight trains through Central Asia, the China-Kazakhstan Horgos International Frontier Cooperation Center and the China-Kazakhstan International Logistics Base in the eastern Chinese port of Lianyungang have all helped open the door to global markets for Central Asian countries. The enhanced interconnectivity has also encouraged many Chinese companies to invest in the region.

Uzbekistan

China and Uzbekistan issued a joint statement last September on promoting their comprehensive strategic partnership and advancing all-round cooperation.

A chemical complex cooperation project under the framework of the BRI has changed the country's dependence on imports of polyvinyl chloride and caustic soda, and created a large number of new jobs, which is of great significance to the economic development of the country.

In March, a fleet of 800 buses manufactured by leading Chinese bus maker Yutong Bus departed Zhengzhou in Central China's Henan province for Uzbekistan. The batch, including 500 compressed natural gas buses and 300 electric buses, was China's largest bus export to Uzbekistan.

Yutong Bus has built a complete after-sales service system, a spare parts storage warehouse and an after-sales service team in Uzbekistan to provide better services.

Kyrgyzstan

The 433-kilometer Bishkek-Osh highway, which connects the northern and southern parts of Kyrgyzstan, is of strategic importance for the development of the country, said Tagai Alimbaev, Asian Development Bank project monitoring and public relations specialist at the Ministry of Transport of Kyrgyzstan.

The construction of the road is divided into three phases with two phases having already been completed by China Road and Bridge Corporation. The third phase is under construction.

After completion of the project, the north-south highway will become the main transport artery connecting north and south Kyrgyzstan and an important international transport channel in Central Asia.

During Xi's state visit to Uzbekistan in September last year, China, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperation on the Kyrgyz section of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway, making significant headway in the construction of a transport corridor in the Eurasian continent.

Tajikistan

China and Tajikistan are friendly neighbors and comprehensive strategic partners, and the strategic guidance of Xi and Tajik President Emomali Rahmon is the biggest political advantage and a solid guarantee for bilateral relations.

Xi called for more concrete results in China-Tajikistan relations, and underscored China's readiness to enhance practical cooperation with Tajikistan, expand the import of quality Tajik agricultural products, elevate the scale and level of bilateral trade, advance cooperation in such areas as infrastructure, water management and transportation, discuss cooperation in green technology, digital economy and artificial intelligence, and assist Tajikistan in promoting cross-border transportation capability.

During his meeting with Xi last September, Rahmon said Tajikistan is ready to strengthen coordination with China in the United Nations, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia and the C+C5 framework to deepen security cooperation and jointly safeguard regional security and stability.

In 2011, the Tajik government and China's TBEA energy company jointly launched the Dushanbe-2 thermal power station project, a combined heat and power plant with total installed capacity of 400 megawatts.

Completed in 2016, the station enabled the restart of central heating for Dushanbe residents after a 15-year hiatus.

Turkmenistan

The visions, goals and interests that China and Turkmenistan share mean that the two sides need to work together on the road to development and rejuvenation to leverage complementary advantages, tap cooperation potential and achieve common development, Xi said after meeting with his Turkmen counterpart Serdar Berdimuhamedov in Beijing in January.

As the second-largest state in Central Asia and the southernmost of the five republics in the region, Turkmenistan acts as a corridor for China to reach important import and export markets in South Asia, the Middle East, Eastern Europe and beyond, as well as to access the Caspian Sea, which lies on the country's western border.

According to statistics from China's Ministry of Commerce, in 2020, China's direct investment in Turkmenistan reached $211 million. By the end of 2020, China's accumulated direct investment in Turkmenistan was $336 million.

Turkmenistan's largest export market is China, which accounted for 76.6 percent of all products in the first quarter last year. China has also been a major investor in Turkmenistan's gas fields, as well as gas pipelines.

The 3,666-km Turkmenistan-China Gas Pipeline, also called the Central Asia-China Gas Pipeline, travels from Gedaim, on the border between Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, to Horgos, in western China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. The natural gas pipeline system and its extension through both countries make it possible to transport Turkmenistan's gas all the way to Shanghai.

Line D of the pipeline is currently under construction, and will be able to transport 30 billion cubic meters of gas per year, giving the Central Asia-China Gas Pipeline network a potential annual export capacity of 85 billion cubic meters, with Turkmenistan remaining the primary source of the gas exported.

Facts and figures

China and the five Central Asian countries have shared fruitful outcomes in various fields of cooperation since the establishment of diplomatic relations 31 years ago. The following are some key figures:

3,300 kilometers
On the basis of mutual understanding and accommodation, China and Central Asia countries have completely resolved boundary issues left from history, turning more than 3,300 kilometers of shared borders into a bond of friendship, mutual trust and cooperation.

$70 billion
China has been the largest or main trading partner of Central Asian countries for many years. Last year, trade between China and Central Asian countries hit a record of more than $70 billion, a 100-fold increase compared to 30 years ago.

62 pairs
The 62 pairs of sister provinces, regions and cities between China and Central Asia and hundreds of thousands of mutual visits every year help carry forward a friendship lasting more than 2,000 years between the people of China and these countries. China has vowed to bring the number of sister cities with the five countries to 100 pairs in the next five to 10 years.

80 percent
As of the end of 2022, more than 65,000 China-Europe freight trains had transported more than 6 million 20-foot equivalent units of cargo worth $300 billion. Nearly 80 percent of the trips passed through Central Asia.

57.1 million doses
China offered 57.1 million doses of vaccines to help the five countries battle COVID-19.

13 Confucius Institutes
Since 2004, China has established 13 Confucius Institutes and 24 Confucius Classrooms in Central Asia, with over 18,000 students now studying at these learning institutions.

29,885 students
China has become one of the main destinations and preferred countries for students in Central Asian countries to study abroad. From 2010 to 2018, the number of Central Asian students studying in China increased from 11,930 to 29,885.

CHINA DAILY—XINHUA

People-to-people exchanges offer opportunity for greater understanding

By **ZHAO RUINAN**, **LIU JIANQIAO** in Beijing and **REN QI** in Astana, Kazakhstan

When Karakoz Askarbekkyzy hesitated about whether to go to Europe or China for further studies more than 10 years ago, her mother encouraged her to go to China, citing the "promising opportunities" for learning the Chinese language and culture.

Karakoz, a 29-year-old Kazakhstani, embarked on her long journey in the neighboring country and has since developed a strong passion for Chinese culture.

"It was not all smooth sailing at the beginning. When I arrived in China, I found that the biggest challenge was the language barrier because Chinese language was way too hard for me," said Karakoz, who now speaks fluent Mandarin, in an interview with China Daily.

After one year of language learning, Karakoz enrolled at Beijing Language and Culture University in 2013 to study international trade and business. She spent three-and-a-half years at BLCU before being admitted to Beijing Normal University for a master's degree in business in 2017.

During her early days in China, Karakoz participated in numerous cultural tours across the country organized by the university.

"We visited Xi'an, Qufu — the hometown of Confucius — Shanghai and many other fascinating places all over China to experience and immerse ourselves in its ancient yet modern culture," she said. "I am a big fan of Chinese food — I love Kung Pao Chicken, Beijing roast duck, and spinach and peanut salad. ... I even cook some Chinese dishes myself now in Kazakhstan when I missed the Chinese flavors."

Karakoz was also actively engaged in cultural exchange activities on campus. "I really enjoy this kind of activities where I can introduce my culture and civilization to students in China. I also tried my hand at learning Chinese calligraphy and paper-cutting," she said. "Chinese culture and people have always left a strong impression on me."

In recent years, people-to-people exchanges between China and the five Central Asian countries — Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan — have become increasingly frequent.

Official data show a consistent increase in the number of Central Asian students studying in China, growing from over 11,000 in 2010 to nearly 30,000 in 2018, with an average annual increase of 12.3 percent.

Wu Zhengpeng (second from left), a teacher from Tianjin Urban Construction Management and Vocation Technology College, introduces how to use mapping devices to students at the Luban Workshop in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, on April 12. KALIZHAN OSPANOV / XINHUA

Gao Hanxun, an associate researcher of Central Asian studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said that China has become one of the preferred destinations for people in Central Asian countries to study abroad, and studying in China has become a trend among young people in the region.

Under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, China and Central Asian countries have strengthened their ties in various aspects, including economic cooperation and people-to-people exchanges, according to Gao.

The BRI was announced in 2013 by President Xi Jinping in Kazakhstan's capital of Astana. Kazakhstan was among the first batch of countries to join the BRI, which involves infrastructure development, trade and investment facilitation, and people-to-people exchanges.

"Youth exchanges have promoted the prosperity of cultures in Central Asia and China, and have also played a significant role in promoting global cultural diversity," Gao said.

According to official data, since 2004, China has established 13 Confucius Institutes and 24 Confucius Classrooms in Central Asia, with over 18,000 students now studying at these learning institutions.

Vocational workshop programs including the famed Luban Workshop are also burgeoning in Tajikistan. Last year, Tajik Technical University, joined by China's Tianjin Urban Construction Management and Vocation Technology College, established a Luban Workshop, making it the first of its kind in Central Asia.

During the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in 2017, Xi highlighted the importance of people-to-people exchanges, saying: "Friendship, which derives from close contact between the people, holds the key to sound state-to-state relations."

Echoing Xi, students from Central Asian countries studying in China find themselves obsessed with Chinese culture, and they gradually develop a deeper understanding of China and Chinese people.

Bekmurzaeva Ainura, an 18-year-old who is now learning Chinese at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, said that it was her childhood dream to come to China.

"When I was a little child, I learned a lot of lessons about Chinese culture, which were very interesting. As I grew up, I saw China is now a country of opportunity, so I came here for studies," she said.

Qurbonov Umedjon, a 23-year-old Tajik who studies international trade at the University of International Business and Economics, said that learning Chinese now is very trendy in Tajikistan.

"There are a lot of training institutions for Chinese language in big cities all over Tajikistan and nearly all the Tajik universities have already set up Chinese language courses."

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Online
See more by scanning the code.

CHINA-CENTRAL ASIA SUMMIT

Talks focus on synergy of development strategies

President Xi Jinping holds bilateral meetings on Thursday with his counterparts from four Central Asian countries who are in Xi'an, the provincial capital of Shaanxi, to attend the China-Central Asia Summit

KYRGYZSTAN

Elevating partnership

By CAO DESHENG in Xi'an
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President Xi Jinping and visiting Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov announced on Thursday that their bilateral ties are being elevated to a comprehensive strategic partnership in the new era, and vowed to build a China-Kyrgyzstan community with a shared future, featuring good neighborliness and common prosperity.

The two presidents signed a joint declaration on the establishment of the comprehensive strategic partnership in the new era following their talks in Xi'an, Shaanxi province. They also witnessed the signing of multiple cooperation agreements in the fields of economy and trade, industry, investment, customs, agriculture, and cultural and people-to-people exchanges.

Japarov is making a state visit to China. During their talks, Xi recalled his two meetings with the Kyrgyz president last year, saying the consensus he reached with Japarov on bilateral ties and cooperation in various fields is being carried forward, injecting strong momentum into the development of the relationship between the two countries.

Xi underlined the need for both countries to strengthen mutual support, especially on issues concerning each other's core interests, and to be good friends who can trust and count on each other.

He called for efforts to strengthen the synergy of development strategies of the two countries, step up policy coordination and advance pragmatic cooperation in various fields, with a focus on high-quality development of the Belt and Road Initiative.

While highlighting their partnership in poverty alleviation and rural revitalization, Xi emphasized deepening mutual connectivity and starting the construction of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Railway project on an early date.

He urged deepening security cooperation between the two countries in order to provide a sound and safe environment for joint building of the Belt and Road, as well as for both countries' development.

Japarov said that ties between the two countries are at their historically best level. Kyrgyzstan firmly supports China's position on China's core interests, including the Taiwan question and issues related to the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, he said.

The Kyrgyz president added that his country stands ready to work with China to promote security and development of both countries and the region, and jointly turn the China-Central Asia Summit into a new cooperation platform for the two sides.

TAJIKISTAN

Reaping benefits

By XU WEI in Xi'an
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President Xi Jinping underlined on Thursday China's readiness to import more high-quality agricultural produce from Tajikistan, saying that the two sides should align development strategies and promote the high-quality building of the Belt and Road.

In talks with visiting Tajik President Emomali Rahmon in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, Xi emphasized the need for both nations to deepen comprehensive strategic cooperation and extend staunch support to each other over issues concerning core interests such as sovereignty, independence, security and territorial integrity.

The Chinese president called on both sides to deepen cooperation on economy, trade, connectivity, agriculture and major projects, and conduct closer people-to-people exchanges.

China is willing to enhance law enforcement cooperation with the Tajik side to jointly safeguard the security of both nations and the region, he said.

Xi highlighted the need to promote the implementation of the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative to jointly uphold the common interests of developing countries.

He expressed his belief that the China-Central Asia Summit will yield fruitful outcomes and usher in a new era for cooperation between the two sides.

Rahmon, who is making a state visit to China, said that bilateral relations are built on a high level of mutual trust, respect and support.

He reiterated that his country adheres to the one-China principle, and remains committed to advancing bilateral strategic partnership and building a community with a shared future.

Rahmon expressed his willingness to borrow the experiences of China's development and scale up cooperation in trade, production capacity, agriculture, transportation, green economy and people-to-people exchanges.

The two leaders signed a joint statement after their talks and witnessed the signing of multiple cooperation agreements covering connectivity, science and technology and exchanges at local levels.

Before his trip to Xi'an, Rahmon held talks with Premier Li Qiang, Wang Huning, chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, and Vice-President Han Zheng in Beijing on Wednesday.

UZBEKISTAN

Promoting stability

By CAO DESHENG in Xi'an
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President Xi Jinping and visiting Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev pledged on Thursday that China and Uzbekistan will work together to promote all-around bilateral cooperation, and jointly contribute to regional security, stability and development.

They signed a joint statement and adopted a plan on promoting comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries between 2023 and 2027, following their talks in Xi'an, the provincial capital of Shaanxi.

Mirziyoyev, who is making a state visit to China, is in Xi'an to attend the China-Central Asia Summit.

The two leaders witnessed the signing of an array of documents on bilateral cooperation in the fields of investment, poverty alleviation, trade in farm produce, quarantine and inspection and subnational cooperation.

Xi recalled his state visit to Uzbekistan in September, when the two presidents announced the building of a China-Uzbekistan community with a shared future, defining the new characterization of the bilateral ties.

He emphasized that China firmly supports Uzbekistan in safeguarding its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, and supports it in pursuing a development path suited to its national conditions.

Both countries should resolutely support each other and act as good friends and partners who can count on each other, Xi said.

He called for expanding economic, trade and investment cooperation, deepening mutual connectivity and boosting partnership in the fields of energy and health.

Both countries should develop anti-terrorism and anti-interference collaboration to contribute to regional security and stability, Xi said.

Noting that the summit is a new milestone in the ties between China and Central Asian countries, Xi said the nation is willing to work with Uzbekistan to promote the construction of the China-Central Asia mechanism and to build an even closer China-Central Asia community with a shared future.

Mirziyoyev assured Xi that his country firmly adheres to the one-China principle. Uzbekistan wants to learn from China's experiences in poverty relief, consistently intensify bilateral cooperation in various fields, and actively implement the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative, he said.

Uzbekistan is willing to develop close multilateral coordination, including that within the China-Central Asia mechanism, to jointly promote regional security and development, he added.

TURKMENISTAN

Enhancing potential

By CAO DESHENG in Xi'an
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President Xi Jinping hailed the relationship between China and Turkmenistan as "having tremendous potential for development" and "enjoying broad prospects", and said that China is willing to work with Turkmenistan to constantly promote bilateral ties and deliver more benefits to the two peoples.

Xi made the remarks on Thursday during a meeting with visiting Turkmen President Serdar Berdimuhamedov in Xi'an, Shaanxi province.

Since the two countries established diplomatic ties 31 years ago, they have developed friendly cooperation while adhering to the principles of mutual respect, mutual benefit and win-win results, he said.

Xi emphasized that China firmly supports Turkmenistan in upholding its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, and also backs it in pursuing a development path suited to its national conditions.

He called for comprehensively enhancing bilateral cooperation. China is willing to work with Turkmenistan to strengthen collaboration in the fields of economy and trade, natural gas and mutual connectivity, as well as to promote high-tech cooperation in the fields of communication and aerospace, he said.

Noting that China and Central Asian countries are a community with a shared future, Xi said that China looks forward to working with the five nations to hold the summit with fruitful results in order to advance the steady development of China-Central Asia cooperation and uphold long-lasting peace and stability in the region.

Berdimuhamedov lauded the development of bilateral ties, saying the countries' relations are based on mutual respect, equality, mutual benefit and win-win results.

Turkmenistan attaches great importance to developing comprehensive strategic partnership with China, and it is ready to advance the alignment of its strategy to revive the Great Silk Road with the Belt and Road Initiative, and deepen cooperation in the key fields of energy and innovation, the Turkmen president said.

He said that the China-Central Asia mechanism will provide new opportunities to deepen friendship and cooperation between the two sides, and have great relevance to global development.

Turkmenistan is ready to develop close communication and cooperation to jointly cope with challenges and promote regional security, stability, development and prosperity, he added.

Xi'an seeks greater tourism cooperation

By MO JINGXI in Xi'an
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Xi'an, the capital of Shaanxi province, is working with Central Asian countries to develop tourism based on intangible cultural resources along the ancient Silk Road in order to better reflect the region's rich history.

The latest example is an agreement signed earlier this month on promoting the tourism resources of the Uzbek city of Samarkand in Xi'an.

"It was agreed that an area at the Silk Road Paradise scenic spot will be specially used to display the traditional architecture of Samarkand and present Uzbek cultural performances," Zhou Bing, chairman of Shaanxi Tourism Group, said at a news conference on Thursday.

Xi'an used to be the capital of 13 dynasties, including the prosperous Zhou, Qin, Han and Tang dynasties. Zhou said the group is seeking to present this rich historical legacy to tourists in specific ways such as theme parks and musical performances.

For example, a musical named *Sound of the Silk Road* has been produced to present the culture and history of various countries along the Silk Road during the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220).

The development of cultural tourism along the Silk Road has gained momentum since the Belt and Road Initiative was proposed in 2013. The Shaanxi provincial government has introduced guidelines urging greater efforts to design tour routes with Xi'an as the starting point and other cultural tourism projects.

According to Zhou, the Shaanxi Tourism Group will organize tour groups from Xi'an to cities with rich tourism resources in Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries.

Visits to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have been facilitated after the two countries introduced 14-day visa-free policies for Chinese citizens.

Zheng Hao, an official with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, said that many provinces and regions in China have given full play to their strengths in terms of their geographical location and resources to engage in culture and tourism exchanges and cooperation with Central Asian countries.

Zheng pointed out that, in recent years, China has invited Central Asian countries to participate in the China International Tourism Fair, and China has also been an active participant in international tourism exhibitions in Central Asian countries.

"China-Central Asia tourism cooperation is distinctive and enjoys broad prospects," he said.

Warm welcome

People walk past a display welcoming delegates to the China-Central Asia Summit in the ancient city of Xi'an, Shaanxi province, on Wednesday. The two-day summit ends on Friday.
PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Excerpts of reports from media in Central Asia

Turkmenistan State News Agency (Turkmenistan)

The China-Central Asia Summit on Thursday and Friday in the ancient Chinese city of Xi'an will open a new epoch in relations between the five countries of Central Asia and China. Well-known think tanks and political scientists have given an assessment of the summit.

According to the experts, the main vectors of cooperation between states in this format are energy, transportation, logistics, investment and trade, and economic spheres.

In fact, the participation of Turkmenistan in the summit provides the energy component of the partnership of states in this format.

The Astana Times (Kazakhstan)

Strengthening regional economic ties will be the main subject of discussions in Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's visit to China, a senior expert at the Institute of World Economy and Politics, Yersultan Zhanseitov, said in an interview. "We have a long history of cooperation with China. In the current times, when the geopolitical situation in Eurasia and in the world is changing, Kazakhstan will be upgrading its national strategy toward China."

Pravda Vostoka (Uzbekistan)

The state visit to China (by Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev) testifies to the high level of bilateral relations and the commitment to further deepening the strategic partnership.

The continuation of the Uzbek-Chinese mutually beneficial strategic dialogue is intended to be a new format for cooperation — the multilateral China-Central Asia meeting, which is being held in the city of Xi'an.

Central Asian countries are successfully cooperating with China, including within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative. The Central Asian states highly appreciate China's unique experience in public administration, economic development and poverty reduction, and are interested in developing comprehensive, mutually beneficial cooperation.

Jibek Joly TV (Kazakhstan)

The China-Central Asia Summit will give new impetus to the interaction among the participating states. Central Asian countries and China recognize the importance of strengthening ties and are ready to expand mutually beneficial relations, experts noted.

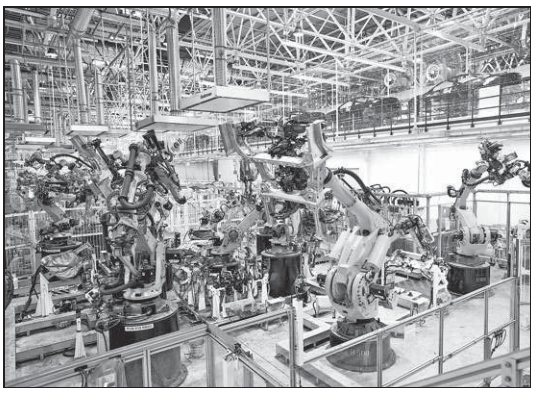
"I believe that the China-Central Asia Summit will start a new chapter for cooperation between the Central Asian countries and China, strengthening key areas of partnership, including the development of transportation infrastructure," said Bekzhan Sadykov, spokesman for the Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies.

Khovar (Tajikistan)

For both China and Central Asia, securing their shared border of over 3,300 kilometers is vital for national security and economic planning. Equally imperative for both is to rid the neighborhood of the perennial menaces of terrorism, separatism and extremism. Tajikistan became the first of the five Central Asian nations to sign Belt and Road Initiative cooperation documents with China, a move soon followed by the four other countries. The BRI builds big infrastructure projects, such as the China-Central Asia natural gas pipeline, the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan International Highway and the Qamchiq Tunnel.

CHINA

Above: Vehicles made by SAIC Motor, based in Shanghai, wait to be exported at a port in the city. FANG ZHE /XINHUA **Right:** Lingang Special Area in Shanghai is home to businesses such as Tesla's gigafactory. GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY



Above: Workers put final touches to a vehicle at Tesla's gigafactory. GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY **Left:** A staff member operates a pilot simulator at a digital exhibition center in Shanghai. MA NING / XINHUA

Shanghai: Opening-up efforts welcomed

From page 1

At least 122 foreign asset management companies from 13 countries have set up operations in the Lujiazui financial hub in eastern Shanghai. Of the 1,736 licensed financial institutions registered in the city, 539 are foreign financial service providers. Nearly half of the foreign banks, jointly-held asset management companies and foreign insurance companies operating in China have set up regional headquarters in Shanghai.

Many initial attempts to facilitate the two-way opening-up of the Chinese financial market have been made in Shanghai.

Crude oil futures, China's first yuan-denominated futures product open to foreign investors, was launched at the Shanghai Futures Exchange in 2018. The Stock Connect program linking the Shanghai and London bourses began in June the following year.

JP Morgan, whose China headquarters are located in Shanghai, was given approval in August 2021 to set up the first wholly foreign-owned securities company in China, and in late March, China's national oil company CNOOC and France's TotalEnergies settled the first yuan-denominated trade for liquefied natural gas via the Shanghai Petroleum and Natural Gas Exchange.

Shanghai's role as an international financial center has thus been consolidated. Data from the Shanghai Municipal Development and Reform Commission show the total trading value in the city reached 2,933 trillion yuan last year, up from 528 trillion yuan in 2012.

Zhou Xiaoquan, head of the Shanghai Municipal Financial Regulatory Bureau, said: "By reaching the world's highest standards, we will make financial services more convenient and strengthen Shanghai's capability in allocating global resources. Only in this way can we create a more amiable financial environment and facilitate China's high-quality economic growth."

The progress made in the financial sector is just one example of the numerous efforts made by Shanghai to advance its two-way opening-up. The China International Import Expo, or CIIE, which has been held annually in the city since 2018, has served as an important platform for advancing China's all-around opening-up.

In addition to the $345.8 billion of intended deals reached at the past five expos, up to 2,000 new products, technologies and services have made their China or global debuts at CIIE.

Swiss industrial conglomerate ABB has attended all five expos, globally showcasing its latest breakthroughs such as the gas leak detection technology ABB HoverGuard. ABB's China chairman Gu Chunyuan said the expo helps the company better understand market demand and the latest industry trends.

"We receive a large number of government delegates and visitors from large corporations every year at CIIE, which has provided us with good opportunities to come up with innovative technologies to better address the demands of local clients," he said.

Stores launched

The trend of products making their regional or global debuts at CIIE extends beyond the expo, with Shanghai increasingly favored by brands from home and abroad for store or product launches.

The Shanghai Municipal Commission of Commerce said 375 new stores opened in the city in the first four months of this year.

Liu Min, deputy director of the commission, said: "These store launches help address supply-side reform at the consumption end. Domestic and international brands can also explore more opportunities to seek product innovation by making various debuts here."

Meanwhile, the China (Shanghai) Pilot Free Trade Zone, which was officially launched in 2013 and underwent expansion in 2015 and 2019, serves as one of the best examples of systematic innovation.

The negative list for foreign investment, first adopted by the Shanghai FTZ when it was launched, was promoted nationwide in July 2017. In early March, the Ministry of Commerce said efforts are being made to trim the national negative list to further relax the limit on foreign capital in certain areas.

The free trade account, first introduced at the Shanghai FTZ in June 2014, has brought increased convenience to companies' cross-border financial businesses — nurturing new business models.

In February last year, textile exporter Orient International Enterprise launched Shanghai's first offshore processing trade business, in which purchased raw materials are directly shipped to the company's overseas production base and delivered to overseas end users when production is completed. This process saves the cost of exporting the completed products from domestic facilities.

Xu Lan, deputy general manager of the transaction banking department at Bank of China in Shanghai, which has provided related services to Orient International, said such progress has been made possible by the free trade account's offshore economic and trade policies. The settlement and exchange services provided by the account have largely enhanced overall efficiency, Xu said.

Lingang Special Area, part of the Shanghai FTZ that was officially launched in August 2019, is another good example of Shanghai's advanced two-way opening-up.

Gu Jun, director of the Shanghai Municipal Development and Reform Commission, said that in recent years Lingang has formed a systematic opening-up mechanism featuring freedom of trade, investment, capital flow, transportation and employment, as well as the rapid connection of information.

Global new energy vehicle giant Tesla has benefited from the systematic advantages in Lingang. It held the groundbreaking ceremony for its Lingang gigafactory in early January 2019, and the first car was completed at this facility 11 months later.

Tesla's vice-president Tao Lin said, "Shanghai has provided Tesla with development opportunities in China."

Chen Kele, deputy director of the intelligent manufacturing promotion division at the Shanghai Municipal Commission of Economy and Informatization, said systematic innovation in Lingang has created a win-win situation. Not only has Tesla's production capacity increased, Shanghai's industrial growth has been boosted and the city's new energy vehicle, or NEV, ecosystem has been optimized, he said.

Over 1.1 million NEVs were in use in Shanghai as of last month, more than in any other city worldwide, data from the commission show. The goal of producing 1.2 million NEVs by the end of 2025, raised by the municipal government in a plan released in early 2021, now appears to be easily attainable.

Six key sectors

In Shanghai, the NEV industry is just one of six key sectors striving to create complete industrial clusters and build a new industrial system. Information technology, biomedicine, high-end equipment, advanced materials and fashionable consumer goods are also seeking substantial growth in the city to facilitate high-quality economic expansion.

To further optimize the city's industrial planning, in 2018, the Shanghai Municipal Government released an industrial map — the first of its kind in the country — and revised it last year. Early last month, Shanghai announced 24 policies to help attract more investment to the city.

The presence of foreign companies and investment is of great importance to Shanghai's optimized industrial planning. As a result, the local government has held global investment promotion conferences annually since 2020, reaching 850 cooperation agreements and attracting investment of about 1.8 trillion yuan.

Zhang Guohua, deputy director of the Shanghai Municipal Commission of Commerce, said that while the actual use of foreign capital rose by 28.1 percent year-on-year to $7.8 billion during the first quarter of this year in the city, the value of foreign capital reaching high-tech industries rose by 45.9 percent year-on-year.

To date this year, local government officials have met with top executives from 51 multinational companies. The government has also set up special service mechanisms to attract, construct and officially operate foreign-invested projects, Zhang said.

The municipal government's efforts have paid off. Shanghai's accumulative actual use of foreign capital exceeds $330 billion. A total of 907 multinational companies have set up regional headquarters in the city, which is also home to 538 multinationals' regional research and development centers.

Meanwhile, some 70,000 foreign companies have set up operations in Shanghai, contributing about 25 percent of the city's GDP and one-third of its tax revenue. They also account for more than half the city's aggregate industrial output generated by companies with an annual turnover of at least 20 million yuan. Nearly two-thirds of Shanghai's annual import and export value has been contributed by these foreign companies.

"Shanghai is still one of the most attractive destinations for foreign investment worldwide," Zhang said.

At the start of this year, the authorities in Shanghai rolled out the latest action plan to improve the city's business environment. The plan has been revised every year since 2018.

Chen Jining, Shanghai's Party secretary, said: "Improving the business environment is key to stabilizing market expectations and strengthening confidence. An optimized business environment is required, as Shanghai aims to further elevate its core competitiveness in the global market and better serve China's new development paradigm."

Zhang said Shanghai should better address the Belt and Road Initiative to set up new cooperation channels and seek fresh growth engines, adding that the China-Europe Railway Express should play a bigger role in providing new trade opportunities for companies based in the city.

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Metropolis marches ahead

Shanghai's GDP

Unit: trillion yuan

Year	GDP
2012	2.13
2022	4.47

Trading volume of Shanghai's financial market

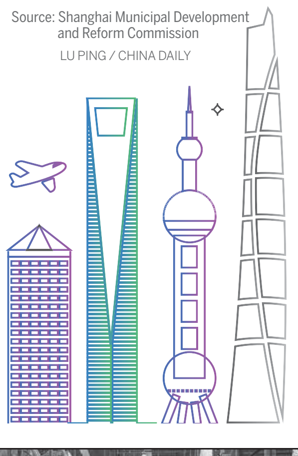
Unit: trillion yuan

Year	Trading volume
2012	528
2022	2.933

- Trade volume through Shanghai's ports in 2022: 10.4 trillion yuan
- Shanghai's accumulative actual use of foreign capital: $330 billion
- Number of foreign companies in Shanghai: 70,000
- Number of multinational companies' regional headquarters in Shanghai: 907
- Number of multinational companies' research and development centers in Shanghai: 538
- Shanghai's per capita disposable income: 79,600 yuan
- Average life expectancy of registered population in Shanghai: 83.18

Source: Shanghai Municipal Development and Reform Commission

LU PING / CHINA DAILY



Left: Lingang Special Area Administrative Service Center in Shanghai offers help to businesses. MA NING / XINHUA **Center:** Goods are stored at a free-trade logistics center in Hongqiao International Business District in Shanghai. GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY **Right:** Visitors sample coffee at the Hongqiao Import Commodity Exhibition and Trade Center in Shanghai. GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY

CHINA

Li stresses value of modern industry

Premier calls for sustained economic recovery during visit to Shandong

By MO JINGXI
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Premier Li Qiang has underlined the importance of accelerating the construction of a modern industrial system underpinned by the real economy, and adopting more targeted measures to expand domestic needs while stabilizing external demand, in an effort to sustain economic recovery and growth.

Li made the remarks during a fact-finding trip to Shandong province from Wednesday to Thursday.

It is important to boost confidence in the country's development and focus on concrete actions to offset the impact of various kinds of uncertainties, he said, urging efforts to promote the high-end, smart and green development of manufacturing industries for the high-quality development of the real economy.

While presiding over a symposium at the end of the trip, Li stressed efforts are needed to guide and create demand with high-quality supply, foster more consumption growth areas and develop new types of consumption.

He emphasized the need to combine the expansion of domestic demand with the improvement of people's livelihoods, saying that solid efforts need to be made to advance projects related to building urban and rural infrastructure, and public services.

Li urged speeding up the development of new forms and models of foreign trade and the use of all means necessary to stabilize market share in international markets.

Attention should be focused on preventing and defusing major risks in key areas to create a favorable environment for economic development, he added.

During his visit to electroacoustic components manufacturer Goertek Inc, and leading Chinese heavy truck and component manufacturer Weichai Group, the premier stressed the need to vigorously develop advanced manufacturing clusters.

He urged efforts to coordinate the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries with the cultivation of emerging industries with strategic importance.

At an automobile sales market, Li called for more efforts to refine policies related to the purchase and use of new energy vehicles, and to speed up the building of charging piles and other facilities to further unleash consumption potential.

In the coastal city of Qingdao, Li visited the China-Shanghai Cooperation Organization Local Economic and Trade Cooperation Demonstration Area. While there he urged efforts to strengthen resource integration and complementary advantages to foster competitiveness and achieve mutual benefits.

At Chinese household appliance manufacturers Haier Group and Hisense Group, the premier expressed his desire for enterprises to cater to consumer needs, engage in personalized customization and create more competitive products to further explore domestic and overseas markets.

Museums celebrated for role in recounting history

By WANG RU in Fuzhou
and WANG KAIHAO in Beijing

China marked the 47th International Museum Day on Thursday with plenty of activities and displays of the latest achievements in the industry.

According to statistics released by the National Cultural Heritage Administration on Thursday, 382 new museums were registered in China last year, bringing the total number of registered museums across the nation to 6,565 as of the end of last year. More than 90 percent of them have free admission.

Last year, more than 34,000 exhibitions and nearly 230,000 educational activities were held in museums across the country, and some 578 million museum visits were made. There were also nearly 10,000 online exhibitions and more than 40,000 educational activities in China, altogether attracting over 1 billion online views.

International Museum Day was launched by the International Council of Museums in 1977. Since China joined the council in 1983, it has organized activities related to International Museum Day each year. Every year since 2009, China has chosen a major venue as the center of nationwide activities celebrating the day.

Fujian Museum in Fuzhou, capital of Fujian province, was the main venue for commemorative activities in the country this year, where highlighted exhibitions, forums on the sustainability of museums and the training of young talent, book launches and other activities were held.

Li Qun, director of the National Cultural Heritage Administration, said at the celebration ceremony that Chinese museums should pay greater attention to building museums more systematically — establishing more types of museums, operated by more segments of society, and becoming more inclusive and accessible to common people — to contribute more to telling the story of China, and showing the origins, development path and achievements of Chinese civilization.

This year's theme for the day was "Museums, Sustainability and Well-being".

"It demonstrates the resolution to make our professional contribution to implement the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations and to make a better world for human civilization," ICOM President Emma Nardi said in her video message to the event in Fuzhou.

"Through the past years, our world has taken on difficult challenges. Museums, as trusted institutions and important threads in our shared social fabric, are more than ever compelled to fulfill our duties to tackle pressing environmental and social issues to help the physical and psychological well-being, not only of people around us, but also our fellows from afar," she said.

The exhibition *Good Fortune Sails Across the World: The Cultural Hallmarks of the Maritime Silk Road*, opened at Fujian Museum on Thursday.

Numerous activities, including special exhibitions, lectures, the release of new cultural souvenirs, and voluntary services were also held across China on Thursday.

In Beijing, a blue paper on the development of the city's museums, including public education, exhibition organization and academic research from 2021 to 2022 was released on Thursday.

The Palace Museum in Beijing, also known as the Forbidden City, announced it released high-definition pictures of more than 20,000 cultural relics in its inventory for public access as its latest achievement in digitization.

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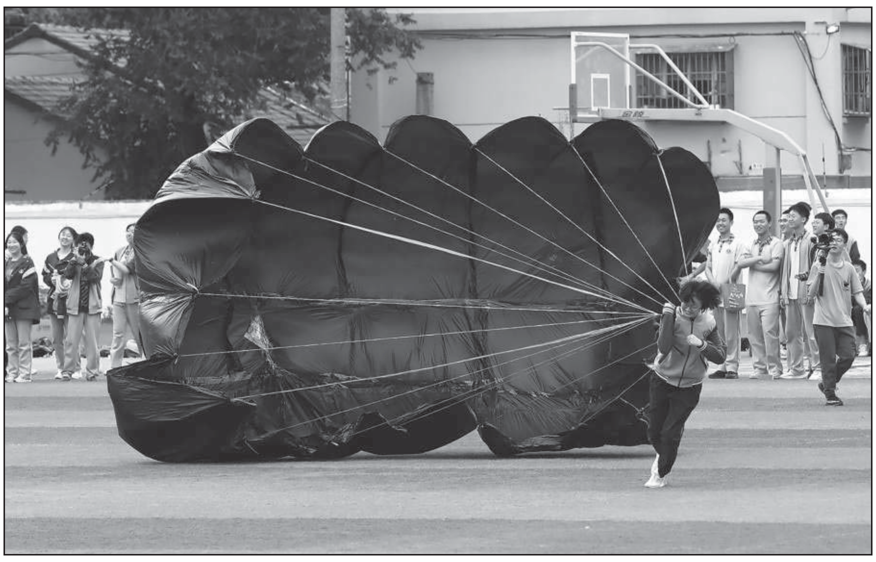
Visitors enjoy Liaocang, a museum that specializes in digital exhibits, in Beijing on Sunday. Revamped from a warehouse in Shougang Park, the show illustrates the culture and history of the capital's Yongding River using immersive and augmented reality technologies. CHEN ZHONGHAO / XINHUA

Against the wind



A student runs with her homemade parachute at a high school science fair in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, on Thursday. Students made parachutes from plastic bags, tied them to their backpacks, and tested their quality by sprinting ahead and experiencing air resistance. LIU LI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Large-scale COVID reemergence 'unlikely' despite uptick in cases

By WANG XIAOYU
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The risk of a new large-scale COVID-19 outbreak in China in the short term is minimal, despite a recent uptick in new infections, according to health experts.

Wang Liping, a researcher at the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, said during a group interview that the recent increase in new cases is unlikely to overwhelm healthcare systems or disrupt public life.

Data from the China CDC show that domestic infections have been trending upward since late April and rising at a faster rate after the May Day holiday from April 29 to May 3. In the past week, its growth rate slowed.

About 7 percent of fever clinic patients have tested positive for COVID-19 this month.

"Domestic infections are likely to grow slowly for some time, and some regions might see an increasing number of cases," she said.

Chen Cao, another researcher from the China CDC, said that infections with the XBB strain accounted for 95.6 percent of all imported cases and 83.6 percent of all domestic cases in early May.

"Research has shown that the transmissibility and immune evasive capability of the XBB variant are stronger than those of other Omicron subvariants, but no major changes in its pathogenicity have been observed," he said. "It is important to keep practicing hygienic measures while avoiding overly panicking or complacency."

> "Most COVID-19 patients we received recently are first-time infections. The proportion of second infections is low and mainly involve young people."
>
> **Li Tongzeng,** chief physician of the respiratory and infectious diseases department of Beijing YouAn Hospital

Wang Guiqiang, head of the infectious disease department at Peking University First Hospital, said that people who were infected during the previous wave of the epidemic late last year still harbor immunity against the disease.

"Even if they are infected again, their symptoms tend to be mild," he said, adding that the severity rate of recent infections is very low and few people require hospitalization.

He said that special attention should be paid to protect the elderly, people who have never been infected and those who are unvaccinated or have preexisting conditions.

In the capital, in a weekly report released by the Beijing Center for Disease Prevention and Control, the number of COVID-19 cases surpassed that of flu for two consecutive weeks, from April 24 to May 7, and infection reports from the clinical side appeared to have increased as well.

Li Tongzeng, chief physician of the respiratory and infectious diseases department of Beijing YouAn Hospital, told Health Times that his department had witnessed a recent increase in COVID-19 cases.

"Most COVID-19 patients we received recently are first-time infections. The proportion of second infections is low and mainly involve young people. Despite milder symptoms compared with the first infection, they are still infectious," Li said.

They should rest at home and can take some nonprescription drugs to alleviate symptoms, based on their condition, Li added.

On Monday, Zhong Nanshan, an academician at the Chinese Academy of Engineering, said the main variant of COVID-19 circulating in Guangzhou is XBB1.9.1, China Media Group reported.

He added that 20 to 25 percent of patients treated in fever clinics in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, were infected with COVID-19.

Vaccines and drugs should be developed to cover the XBB variant for special groups, including the elderly with immune deficiency or underlying diseases, he said.

Wang Songsong contributed to this story.

2 bodies found after fishing vessel capsizes in Indian Ocean

By LUO WANGSHU
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Two bodies were found on Thursday afternoon after a Chinese deep-sea fishing vessel capsized on Tuesday in the Indian Ocean with 39 crew on board, the Ministry of Transport said on Thursday.

Nine Chinese vessels and one foreign vessel have carried out search and rescue operations. Another two vessels deployed from China are expected to arrive in the area on Friday to join the search.

The crew members of the capsized vessel, *Lu Peng Yuan Yu 028* — comprising 17 Chinese, 17 Indonesian and five Filipino sailors — have been missing since 3 am on Tuesday when the incident occurred in the central Indian Ocean.

President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang ordered all-out search and rescue efforts on Tuesday, urging relevant departments to reduce casualties and strengthen safety management in deep-sea operations.

The vessel is owned by Penglai Jinglu Fishery Co, a major fishing company based in Yantai, Shandong province.

According to the Ministry of Transport, a small number of floating objects such as woven bags and plastic baskets have been found.

The two bodies were discovered by a naval vessel at about 1:30 pm on Thursday, the ministry said.

On Wednesday, four aircraft — three from Australia and one from India — joined in the search. Australia is expected to send aircraft to continue search and rescue on Thursday.

The Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs have maintained close communication and arranged additional forces to carry out search and rescue, according to the Ministry of Transport.

The cause of the capsizing is as yet unknown.

Tech: Power of AI needs to be harnessed for innovation

From page 1

Jointly organized by China Daily and the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China Tianjin Municipal Committee, the event, themed "Intelligence: Extensive Development Space, Sustainable Growth Driver", was broadcast to a global audience on Thursday night. The event is part of the ongoing 7th World Intelligence Congress, which started on Thursday and runs through Sunday in Tianjin.

The congress showcases the latest achievements and trends of AI development and brings together officials, experts, scholars and entrepreneurs to discuss key topics such as intelligent connected vehicles, generative AI, intelligent manufacturing, brain-machine interaction and other cutting-edge technologies.

"We need to harness the power of the new generation of artificial intelligence to drive technological innovation, upgrade industries and boost productivity," said Shen Lei, a member of the Standing Committee of the CPC Tianjin Municipal Committee and head of the committee's Publicity Department.

Shen highlighted the significance of fostering new advantages in industrial development by vigorously developing the digital economy, accelerating industrial digitalization and digital industrialization, and promoting the in-depth integration of the internet, big data and AI with industries.

Tianjin, a major port city in northern China, has been actively embracing AI, intelligent manufacturing and other related smart technologies to stay abreast of key developments. It has set up a special 10 billion yuan ($1.42 billion) fund for intelligent manufacturing and a 100-billion-yuan industry fund for the new generation of AI.

Shen said Tianjin will deepen reform and opening-up, create a world-class business environment that is market-oriented, law-based and internationalized, and build a high-level platform for opening-up.

Wei Qing, Microsoft (China) Ltd's chief technology officer, said no matter how powerful AI is, it is a machine's capability. How humans react to, manage and guide it will determine whether it serves human purposes. "So, there must be a responsible AI approach and principle," Wei added.

AI is gradually being implemented in the medical field, covering screening, diagnosis, treatment and predictions, said Yan Hua, Party secretary of Tianjin Medical University. It helps to provide better hospital management, patient services, chronic disease management and more efficient medical process.

There are still problems in AI's use in the medical field, such as ethical issues, data security and the calculation of the cost of AI, Yan said, adding that its application in the field is still in the early stages of development.

Pierre Pakey, head of product innovation of Laiye Technology (Beijing) Co, said one of the most exciting developments in AI is that large language models can sometimes provide much finer details than human efforts.

Fu Xiaolan, a fellow of the British Academy of Social Sciences and professor and director of the Technology and Management Center for Development at the University of Oxford, said AI can bring wonderful opportunities for development through providing greater efficiency and improvement in work conditions and welfare. It can also enable innovation in production and social services, and bring significant digital windows of opportunity for some developing countries.

Although AI brings new development opportunities, there are still challenges to face, she added.

"We need to ensure the privacy, security and safety and robustness in the use of AI and also the transparency and fairness in the application of AI and accountability of the people who develop and employ AI for business and other services," Fu said.

AI has immense potential for revolutionizing transportation in areas such as managing traffic jams and making streets safer, more efficient and environmentally friendly, said Minh Thao Chan, a PhD student majoring in electronic engineering at Tsinghua University.

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VISION CHINA

THE IMPORTANCE OF AR

Speeches focus on technology's abilit

Tianjin striving to become high-tech hub

By FAN FEIFEI
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Shen Lei, a member of the Standing Committee of the Communist Party of China Tianjin Municipal Committee and head of the committee's Publicity Department, addresses the latest Vision China event in Tianjin on Thursday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

With emerging digital technologies like artificial intelligence expanding rapidly around the world, the northern port city of Tianjin plans to bolster efforts to promote development through technological innovation and opening-up, as well as education, technology and a strong workforce, a local senior official said.

Shen Lei, a member of the Standing Committee of the Communist Party of China Tianjin Municipal Committee and head of the committee's Publicity Department, said that in today's world, a new wave in the information technology revolution is in full swing, bringing profound change to industrial development.

"Data, algorithms and computing power have become crucial factors in determining the overall competitiveness of a region or country," she said at the latest Vision China event held on Thursday night.

"We need to harness the power of the new generation of artificial intelligence to drive technological innovation, upgrade industries and boost productivity."

Shen stressed the need to foster advantages in industrial development by vigorously developing the digital economy, accelerating the industrialization of digital technologies and the digital transformation of industries, and promoting the in-depth integration of the internet, big data and artificial intelligence with industries.

During the first quarter of this year, Tianjin's economy showed significant improvement and accelerated growth, with its GDP expanding by 5.5 percent year-on-year to 371.5 billion yuan ($53.3 billion) during the period.

The city's industrial output — a gauge of activity in the manufacturing, mining and utilities sectors — rose by 3.1 percent in the January-March period from a year earlier, after a 1.5 percent rise in the first two months.

Tianjin is shaping up to become a high-tech hub and has rolled out a series of policies to develop the AI sector. It has set up a special fund of 10 billion yuan for intelligent manufacturing, and a 100-billion-yuan industry fund for the new generation of artificial intelligence.

Shen said that as a megacity with over 10 million people and a rich cultural heritage, Tianjin occupies a strategic position in national development and boasts regional, industrial and resource advantages that can help it achieve growth.

She emphasized that Tianjin will deepen reform and opening-up, create a world-class business environment that is market-oriented, law-based, and internationalized, and set up a high-level platform for opening up.

Noting education, science and technology, and human resources as the foundational and strategic pillars for creating a modern socialist country in all respects, Shen said Tianjin will implement its action plan to develop the city through science, education and a highly-skilled workforce.

"This involves close integration between education and industry, between science and the economy, and between workforce building and development, and we shall create a sustainable competitive advantage for Tianjin by turning it into a city with high-quality education, a hub for scientific and technological innovation, and an open platform for attracting top talent," she said.

The Tiankai Higher Education Innovation Park also officially opened on Thursday. Shen explained the name "Tiankai" not only represents the collaboration between the two renowned century-old universities of Tianjin University and Nankai University, but also embodies the idea of revitalization.

The park aims to become a source of scientific and technological innovation, promoting the commercialization of scientific and technological breakthroughs, and the integrated development of innovative industrial chains.

Expert: People must have control over AI

By JIANG CHENGLONG
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Fu Xiaolan

Society can benefit from the new wave of technical revolution being unleashed by artificial intelligence, but must make sure that it remains under the control of humans, an expert said on Thursday.

Fu Xiaolan, a fellow at the National Academy of Social Sciences in the United Kingdom, was speaking at Vision China, which was organized by China Daily and the Tianjin Municipal Party Committee's publicity department.

The convergence of rapid technological breakthroughs has created new models of value production and a new industrial revolution, said Fu, who is also the founding director of Oxford University's Technology and Management Center for Development.

"Artificial intelligence is one of the core technologies at the heart of this revolution," she said. "The impact of artificial intelligence on society includes opportunities and challenges."

Fu highlighted the "wonderful opportunities for development" — greater efficiency, improvement of work conditions and welfare.

She cited the use of AI doctors during the COVID-19 pandemic as an example, and the opportunity the technology provides to developing countries that could enable them to skip some stages of development.

She also warned of the challenges created by AI.

"AI can replace workers, including skilled workers, whose jobs are repetitive and routine," she said.

"It can also significantly increase income inequality between rich and poor — those who own the technology and those who don't — and between countries."

AI may also deepen the existing digital divide and favor countries that have the needed skills, she said, adding that there are also privacy and security concerns and that the algorithms may contain embedded bias, which could influence outcomes.

"While globally, AI opens digital windows of opportunity for developing countries, there is also the risk that the opportunity for developing countries to catch up might narrow," Fu said, referring to the rapid rise of AI, as well as the infrastructure needed to develop it.

These challenges have also been highlighted by governments, tech giants, institutes and experts, especially since ChatGPT was launched earlier this year.

In a white paper on regulating AI released in late March, the British government proposed adopting a comprehensive regulatory approach. Italy and Canada have also underscored the data security risks posed by ChatGPT.

Stressing the importance of ensuring AI is responsible and ethical if it is to be useful, Fu emphasized the need to build privacy, robustness, transparency and fairness into the tech, noting that those who develop and employ AI for business and other services should be held accountable.

Trust must be created around the technology so that people have the confidence to use AI for economic and welfare improvement, Fu said.

By MA SI
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As digital technology becomes a pioneering force in driving the global technological revolution and industrial transformation, more effort is needed to allow intelligent technology to promote the national goal of the "building of a community with a shared future for mankind", according to Qu Yingpu, publisher and editor-in-chief of China Daily.

Speaking at the Vision China event on Thursday, Qu said that artificial intelligence, represented by ChatGPT, in particular, has become a buzzword, and many foreign experts believe that its advent is as important as the arrival of the PC or the internet.

An acronym for "Chat Generative Pre-trained Transformer", ChatGPT is an AI chatbot developed by OpenAI, a company based in the United States. It has wowed the world with its ability to take on a variety of tasks such as writing essays, debugging programs and making business plans, abilities that differentiate it from earlier, more narrowly focused AI projects that excelled in only one area.

Though different views on GPT exist, it is widely hoped that the latest technology will play a "positive and proactive" role in improving well-being, Qu said.

According to him, this potential can be fully leveraged to promote the "building of a community with a shared future for mankind", a concept first proposed by President Xi Jinping in

Qu Yingpu, publi
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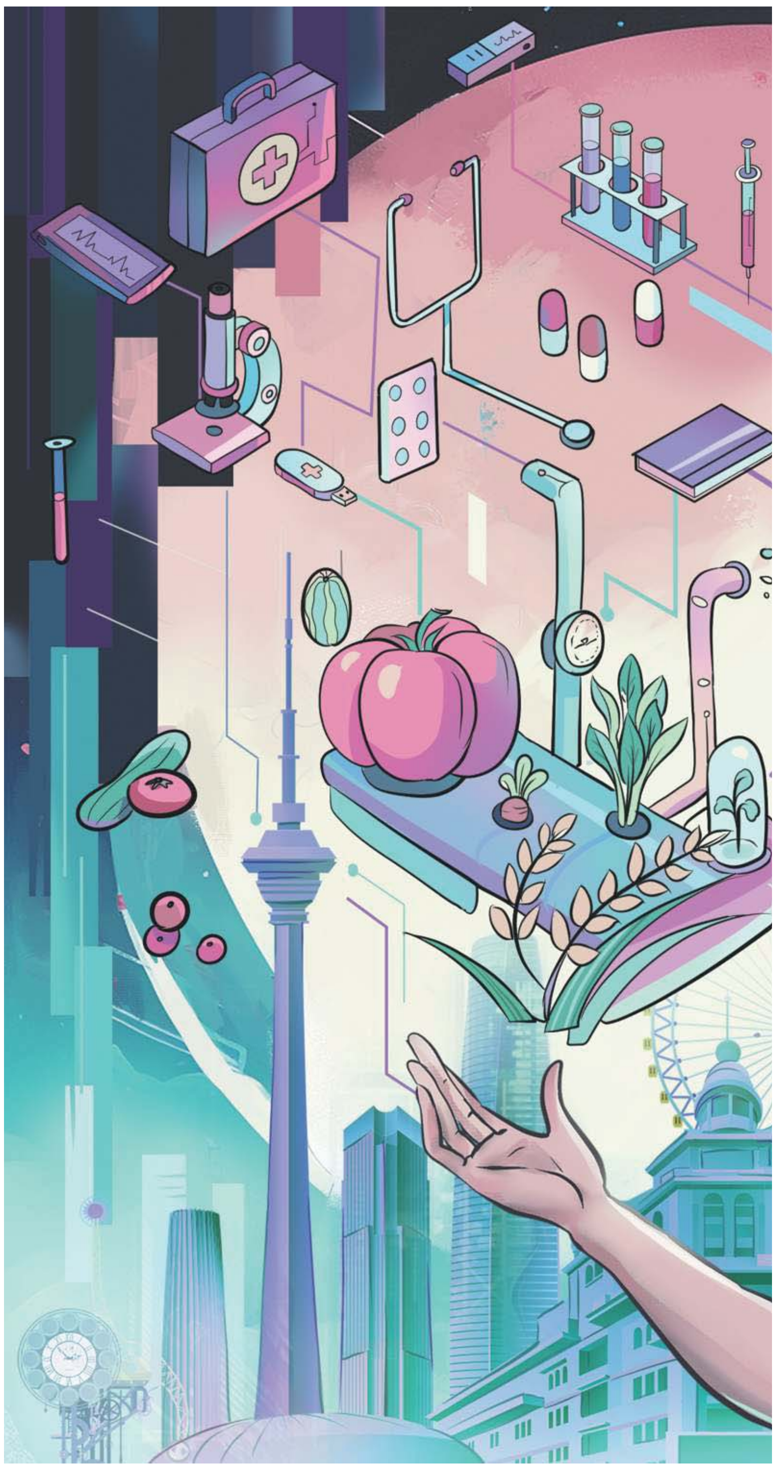

Microsoft executive says positioning of human-machine relationship is critical

By MA SI

A responsible approach is needed to maximize the benefits of artificial intelligence, which as a tool could be a powerful assistant to humans, according to a senior executive of United States tech giant Microsoft.

At Vision China on Thursday, Wei Qing, chief technology officer of Microsoft (China) Ltd, said that in the era of AI, positioning the relationship between humans and machines is of crucial importance.

"AI should be a copilot rather than an autopilot. In other words, the machine is an assistant to help people, and no matter how powerful, it is always in the side seat, not in the driver's seat," Wei said.

He referred to US engineer Vannevar Bush, who in 1945 published an essay titled "As We May Think", in which he was already envisioning the information era and the need to design a machine to help humans manage the information overload.

More importantly, Bush envisioned that the machine would be able to process information through selection by association, which Wei said is similar to the way generative AI works now.

Generative AI is the latest tech frontier and has taken the world by storm. It refers to computer algorithms trained to produce new text, images, code, video or audio, a key example of which is ChatGPT, an AI chatbot developed by US-based AI research company OpenAI.

Wei quoted a line from the 1927 movie *Metropolis* describing the difference between humans and machines: "The mediator between head and hands must be the heart."

"It is all about how to position humans and how to position machines. If we position this incorrectly, this might have a negative impact on society, but if this is positioned in the right way, as we mentioned just now, in a responsible way, we might see the coming of a new era of AI that will really help humans in a purposeful manner," Wei added.

Wei Qing

His comments come in the wake of global discussion over the use of ChatGPT-style products and related AI technology, which have raised concerns of ethics, data security and infringement of personal privacy.

Meanwhile, the number of incidents involving the misuse of AI continues to rise. According to the AIAAIC database, an independent organization that tracks incidents related to the ethical misuse of AI, the number of incidents and controversies has increased 26-fold since 2012.

In an open letter in March, Tesla CEO Elon Musk and a group of AI experts and industry executives called for a six-month pause in developing language models more powerful than OpenAI's newly launched GPT-4, citing potential risks to society, with experts saying the development of responsible AI is vital to long-term, sustainable growth.

"At Microsoft, we have principles laid out as our North Star in doing all things related to AI, which starts from a foundation of accountability and covers all stages," Wei said.

But principles don't execute themselves, and they need to be interpreted. To solve this problem, Microsoft also provides tools and frameworks such as a measurement standard and tests for promoting

TIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

ty to drive economies, create dialogue

sher and editor-in-chief of China Daily, speaks at event in Tianjin. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

the future, we in to the role of ology in imple-menting the 'Three Initiatives' proposed by President Xi, " Qu added. This refers to the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative.

He made the comments as global economic recovery faces challenges, with problems including the disparity in development, dilemmas of governance, the digital divide and the equity deficit becoming more prominent. Concerns also exist that a new digital divide may emerge in the intelligent era.

"We should bridge the digital divide and create cohesiveness for the implementation of the Global Development Initiative," Qu said.

The publisher highlighted the fact that more effort is needed to nurture new drivers of economic growth in the post-epidemic era and create an open, fair, just and nondiscriminatory environment for scientific and technological development.

While praising the convenience and potential dividends that intelligent technology offers humanity, Qu also acknowledged that it is a double-edged sword and may create many challenges, as well as ethical issues.

"We should improve global governance of science and technology, and ensure intelligent technology evolves in the right direction to provide a strong pillar for global security," Qu said.

In February, the Chinese Foreign Ministry published The Global Security Initiative Concept Paper, which called for greater effort to strengthen international governance of AI and other emerging technologies to prevent potential security risks.

An analysis of the legislative records of 127 countries shows that the number of bills containing the term "artificial intelligence" that were passed into law grew to 37 last year from just one in 2016, according to the AI Index Report 2023 produced by Stanford University.

"AI has moved into its era of deployment; throughout 2022 and the beginning of 2023, new large-scale AI models have been released every month," Jack Clark, co-director of the Stanford Institute of Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence, wrote in the report.

"Given the increased presence of AI and its potential for massive disruption, we should all begin thinking more critically about how exactly we want AI to be developed and deployed."

As intelligent technology injects new vitality into global development, Qu also highlighted the importance of promoting exchanges to empower the implementation of the Global Civilization Initiative.

"We should further tap into the potential of intelligent technology and explore scenario-based, smart applications of cutting-edge technology to build new platforms for dialogue among civilizations, and for cross-cultural communication," Qu said.

By way of example, China Daily set up the MetaTime studio last year, which combines research from major projects such as the national project to trace the origins of Chinese civilization, and new technology such as the metaverse, to showcase the charm and significance of China's traditional culture and show the world a credible, attractive and respectable China.

The move resonates with the public's growing enthusiasm for AI. Citizens from China, Saudi Arabia and India are among those who feel the most positively about AI products and services, according to a survey of nearly 20,000 adults from 28 countries by Ipsos, a global market research group.

About 78 percent of Chinese respondents, the highest proportion among surveyed countries, agreed with the statement that products and services using AI have more benefits than drawbacks.

This was followed by Saudi Arabia (76 percent) and India (71 percent), Ipsos added.

MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

AI's potential use in medicine vast

By WANG XIAOYU
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Artificial intelligence can be harnessed to boost the efficiency of healthcare services and hospital management, devise tailored treatment plans and help address the shortage of doctors, a senior hospital manager said on Thursday.

Yan Hua, an ophthalmologist who is also Party chief of Tianjin Medical University, said that a wide range of AI tools such as speech recognition, computer vision, data collection and analysis can be deployed to empower the medical sector.

"AI can improve the efficiency of diagnosis and treatment and increase safety and precision in patient care," he said during a Vision China event organized by China Daily in Tianjin. "It can also prescribe personalized medicine based on the particular conditions and genomic information of patients to improve treatment outcomes."

Yan said that AI can also play a positive role in enhancing hospital management and alleviating the lack of doctors. It can also help patch the healthcare insurance net in less-developed regions.

"For instance, grassroots eye doctors might not be capable of detecting diabetic retinopathy accurately and might have no idea how to deliver treatment.

Yan Hua

But if communities are equipped with an AI device to help them screen for the condition, those showing signs of the disease can be diagnosed and transferred to better hospitals where they can be treated," he said.

Yan said that the accuracy rate of AI-powered diagnosis is nearly on par with that of experienced doctors, but AI greatly shortens the time it takes to generate a correct diagnosis.

"Also, for patients with very complicated eye diseases, AI can be used to help design and execute a surgery," he added.

Yan said that for patients with severe eye trauma and who have lost the perception of light, the question of whether a vitrectomy — surgery to remove the eye's vitreous humor, the tissue behind the lens of the eye, and replace it with another solution — would yield the desired results is difficult for even top doctors to determine.

"We have therefore developed and upgraded an AI model that is fed the condition of patients before surgery, such as whether the retina is detached or the vision is impaired," he said.

"As a result of continuous training and testing, the system can generate an accurate prediction of the post-surgery level of vision."

Yan Hua said that AI's spread into the healthcare sector has begun but remains at an early stage.

"Although AI has many advantages, doctors cannot be replaced entirely because AI needs to learn and train," he said.

"As the medical field advances, doctors are still needed to continue feeding fresh data to the AI for it to process."

A potential caveat, he said, is how to determine legal responsibilities when an incorrect diagnosis is given, or a misuse of technologies occurs.

"The protection of patient-doctor privacy and data security are bound to be essential tasks," he said.

Yan added that there is no standard pricing mechanism for medical services involving AI so far, which could prevent hospitals from purchasing and deploying AI equipment.

Laiye discusses language models

By ZHU WENQIAN
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Pierre Pakey, head of product innovation at Laiye Technology (Beijing) Co Ltd, shared his thoughts about how large language models, a new path in artificial intelligence, can mimic human minds in some ways during the latest Vision China.

Previously, the most common way to train AI was to give it plenty of examples, a process called supervised training.

With the new approach of descriptive training, AIs are trained in the same way humans would be, by describing the task that requires completion in natural language, Pakey said.

Taking the example of intelligent document processing, where the goal is to extract key information such as issue dates, supplier addresses and vendor names from an invoice, he said that the common way of training involves feeding the AI thousands of invoices.

But as invoices vary, one of the issues is physically pinpointing the positions of each

Pierre Pakey

piece of information on the documents in order to train the language model. This process is both slow and prone to errors, Pakey said.

"With descriptive training, people just describe what they want in plain language. So it's extremely simple and it completely changes the time necessary to actually launch a new AI and train on a new task," he said.

With descriptive training, users must ask themselves what the best question is, and what is the best way of asking the model to perform the desired task. This process is called prompt engineering.

"The first time we launched a large language model in production, we had very disappointing accuracy, meaning that our metrics were telling us this was a bad model. When we dove deeply to understand why our accuracy was poor, we noticed that the model was still doing better than the human laborers it was ranked against," he said.

The large language model needed to handle hundreds and even thousands of different examples, and in this situation, it did better than human workers at labeling.

As with any AI model, its accuracy did not exceed 95 percent, and Pakey said that if users needed further improvements, it was only a question of aligning expectations and of being very clear about what information they wanted to extract.

Large language models still have limitations. They need to be given time to produce a good answer, and when prompting different models for an answer, it's important to bear in mind the trade off between complexity and accuracy, Pakey said.

"But most importantly, they are able to learn new tasks almost instantly, and that makes this one of the most exciting things that we have seen in AI in a long time."

responsible AI development, Wei added.

He also highlighted the fact that even though AI is now the buzzword, digital transformation remains the foundation for the progress of machine capabilities.

"No matter how powerful a machine is, it needs human data, either human-generated data or data generated by human-developed machines," Wei said.

"Then, through computer algorithms, AI can turn data and point-in-time data into information and knowledge.

"Its like the well-known information pyramid, DIKW — data, information, knowledge and wisdom. Humans should stay at the top, at the wisdom level, and machines should handle the rest of the work."

PhD student extols rise of self-driving cars

By ZOU SHUO
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The future of AI and autonomous driving is exciting, and people should harness its combined power to create an inclusive, sustainable and prosperous future for all, according to Minh Thao Chan, an international student at Tsinghua University.

As a doctoral student in electronic engineering specializing in autonomous driving, he has witnessed the transformation of the AI landscape in China and is inspired by its passion, dedication and collaboration.

"Imagine a street in Beijing teeming with cars, pedestrians and cyclists, along which an autonomous vehicle moves gracefully, navigating the labyrinth of traffic, making split-second decisions with precision and accuracy," he said at Vision China on Thursday night.

This would be a sight to behold and symbolizes AI's potential to create a future where traffic jams are a memory and streets are safer, more efficient and environmentally friendly, he said, adding that it's a future that China is on the cusp of realizing.

When Thao Chan arrived in China from France in 2016, electric vehicles were just being introduced. By 2018, most taxis were electric, and in the last three years, autonomous vehicles have gone through trials at test centers and, more recently, on roads in Shanghai and Shenzhen, Guangdong province.

As more people embrace the potential of autonomous driving, these vehicles are becoming integral parts of the urban fabric, transforming how we live, work and play.

Thao Chan used the example of a visually impaired woman in Beijing to explain the power of AI and autonomous driving to change lives.

For most of her life, she relied on others for mobility, but the arrival of autonomous vehicles granted her newfound independence. She is now able to order a self-driving car and go wherever she desires.

Minh Thao Chan

However, he said that as people explore the potential of AI and autonomous driving, they must remain mindful of the challenges they present.

Data privacy, cybersecurity and ethical considerations must be addressed, and it is the collective responsibility of researchers, policymakers and citizens to ensure that AI technology remains safe.

"We have an unparalleled opportunity to shape a world that is more intelligent, more connected and more compassionate," he said.

"Together, we can forge a new era of transportation and mobility. Together, we can build a future where technology serves not just as a tool, but as a force for good, improving lives and fostering greater understanding, connection and collaboration across the globe."

COMMENT/DOCUMENT

Editorials

Biden transforms US governance crisis into dangerously growing concern for all

In a news conference at the White House on Wednesday, US President Joe Biden was asked whether the canceling of his trip to Australia to attend the Quad's summit in Sydney scheduled for May 24 represented "almost a win for China". "No. No," he replied.

Since the other Quad members will all be attending the G7 Summit in Hiroshima, Japan, he said they will get a chance to talk separately at the meeting. "We're still meeting (in Hiroshima). We still have four (sic) good allies."

That reply exposes the lie that the Quad, which groups Japan, India and Australia with the United States, is working for an "open, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific", as well as the hollow ring of the host's claim that the Sydney gathering would "showcase the Quad's enduring contribution to the region and the tangible benefits we are delivering for Indo-Pacific partners".

The summit was immediately called off after Biden canceled his trip in order to negotiate with the Republicans on a new debt ceiling to avoid a debt default of the US government.

That Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida quickly followed suit shows the core role the US plays in the group, as well as the lack of reason for the group's existence, since it is simply a tool of the US' "Indo-Pacific" contain-China strategy.

Although Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is still paying a visit to Australia after attending the gathering in Japan, that is largely a reciprocal gesture for Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's visit to India in March.

Although China is expected to dominate the discussions in Hiroshima — G7, Quad and others — under the orchestration of the US, how far Biden can hijack them with Washington's agenda remains to be seen.

It is a pity that the leader of the world's largest economy and sole superpower still fails to realize that the US' challenges are of its own making and they cannot be resolved — indeed they will only be further aggravated and complicated — by turning a long-term partner into a rival. Not to mention the uncertainties and risks that the US will subject itself to, along with the rest of the world, by doing so.

This is what it is doing, intentionally or not. The Biden administration has already made it clear that the G7 gathering is to be used as a platform to form a united front against what the US alleges is China's "economic coercion". The fact that this united front is being formed to help the US bolster its economic coercion against China shows the way in which the US tries to pin its own unruly behavior on others.

In fact, the Biden administration's state, defense and commerce secretaries have already made clear in their testimonies at a congressional budget hearing on Tuesday what will be the main points of Biden's agenda in Hiroshima, which will be to call on the US' allies to synergize their actions to support the US' military oppression against, diplomatic coercion of and economic decoupling with China.

Cooperation at heart of modern Silk Road

The success of the bilateral meetings President Xi Jinping held respectively with the leaders of the five Central Asian countries in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, on Wednesday and Thursday, undoubtedly lays a solid foundation for the China-Central Asia Summit to be held in the city on Friday realizing its objectives of promoting common development and deepening mutual trust.

The summit will be the first in-person meeting of the six leaders, underscoring the two sides' shared desire to join hands and support each other in the face of common challenges. Tasked with lifting reciprocal cooperation between China and Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to a higher level, the China-Central Asia Summit will promote closer interaction and stronger solidarity among the six nations.

The leaders of the six countries are holding multiple meetings in which they will not only exchange views on bilateral, multilateral, and major international and regional issues, but also sign an array of cooperation documents covering areas including economy, trade, investment and connectivity.

President Xi proposed to build the Silk Road Economic Belt during his visit to Kazakhstan in 2013. Central Asian countries were among the first group of countries to publicly support what subsequently became the Belt and Road Initiative.

Having visited the region seven times in the past decade, Xi has personally championed upgraded China-Central Asia cooperation. And thanks to that, the two sides have steadily strengthened their economic and security cooperation, thus laying a solid foundation for further deepening their trade, economic and investment cooperation.

Since unveiling the Global Development Initiative at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2021, President Xi has also put forward the Global Security Initiative and Global Civilization Initiative as facilitators for the realization of a community with a shared future for mankind. In light of this, the China-Central Asia Summit is a natural event warranting no raised eyebrows.

The bid to strengthen cooperation and coordination in the region is not intended to form a clique, nor is it targeted at any third party. It is an outcome of the six countries' shared recognition that to achieve the development they are striving for, there needs to be greater economic interdependence among them and effective regional security governance; these require the establishment of effective multilateral mechanisms.

No doubt the United States and its allies will try to cast this in a different light, because to them the Central Asian countries are just pawns to play in their zero-sum games against China and Russia. But the summit shows that the Central Asian countries have no desire to play that allotted role.

Tokyo deplorably disregards discharge anxieties

Ever since the Japanese authorities approved Tokyo Electric Power Company's plan to release nuclear contaminated water from the reactors of the damaged Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant into the Pacific Ocean last year, there has been great concern about the environmental consequences of doing so.

Given the harmful potential to the Japanese fishing industry and local residents' livelihoods, as well as to coastal countries and regions nearby, a decision of such significance would usually entail extensive consultation and communication.

But rather than properly addressing the legitimate worries of the Japanese public and neighboring countries, who have largely been left in the dark over the trustworthiness of the treatment plan and ultimate safety standards, TEPCO and the Japanese authorities are pressing ahead anyway. Late last month, TEPCO announced the completion of the undersea pipelines that will be used to release the contaminated water into the ocean. The discharge may begin as early as July.

It is outrageously irresponsible of Japan to proceed with the plan with the safety concerns still unaddressed. Such open disregard of warranted anxiety is deplorable. On Tuesday, hundreds of Japanese citizens gathered outside TEPCO headquarters and a parliament facility to protest, and asked the government to suspend the release plan. They also demanded the government publish data on the kinds of radioactive elements and their contents, and make an alternative plan. Representatives of some environmental groups from the Republic of Korea also reportedly joined the protests in Tokyo. According to ROK media, more than 160 civic organizations held demonstrations across the country last month protesting against the Japanese release plan.

In a bid to appease opposition from the ROK, with whom Tokyo has been doing hasty diplomatic fence-mending under the United States' "Indo-Pacific" strategy, the Japanese government reached an agreement with Seoul on May 12, allowing the latter to send a 20-member delegation on an inspection tour to the Fukushima site. The agreement, if implemented well, might be conducive to sharing critical information. But with the two governments preoccupied with "bigger issues" in the region, it could well prove to be nothing more than a symbolic gesture that would not impact Japan's water release plan.

The Minjoo Party of Korea, now the biggest opposition party in the ROK, dispatched a delegation to Japan in April, which asked TEPCO to provide data about the contaminated wastewater, and tried to carry out on-site inspections. But it was only given access to government data and designated areas. According to Japanese sources, their visit was only meant to "deepen understanding", instead of to "verify safety", because Tokyo is under no obligation to accept "inspection" by another country.

If Tokyo continues that line of thinking, it is very likely the agreed trip will simply be "going through the motions", as some have warned.

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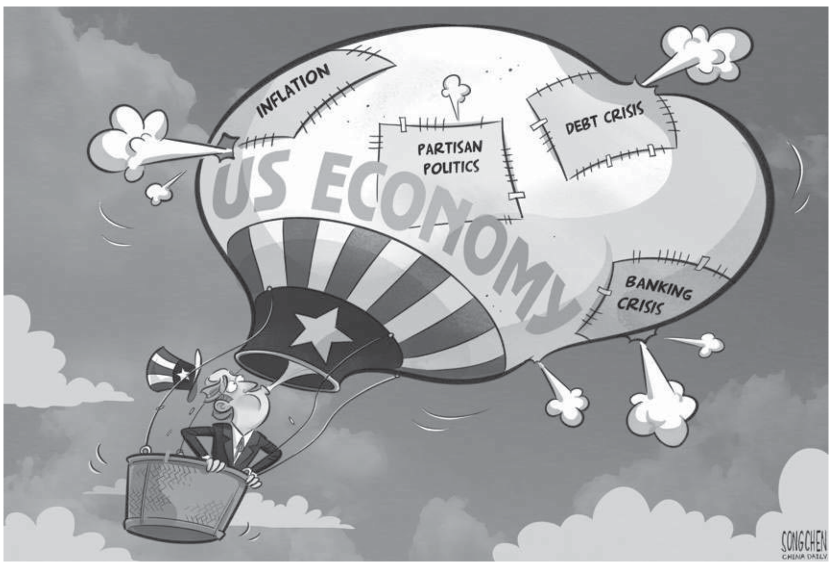

America's Coercive Diplomacy and Its Harm

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I. The United States' coercive diplomacy has a notorious record
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Introduction

The United States is used to accusing other countries of using great power status, coercive policies and economic coercion to coerce other countries to obey and engage in coercive diplomacy, but in fact, the United States is the instigator of coercive diplomacy. The invention rights, patent rights and intellectual property rights of coercive diplomacy all belong to the United States. For a long time, the United States will do everything possible to coerce other countries, and the United States has a very disgraceful "dark history" in coercive diplomacy. Today, coercive diplomacy is a standard instrument in the US foreign policy toolbox, and containment and suppression in political, economic, military, cultural and other fields have been used to conduct coercive diplomacy around the world for pure US self-interest. Countries around the world have suffered, with developing countries bearing the brunt of it, and even US' allies and partners have not been spared.

Based on abundant facts and data, this report aims to expose the evil deeds of US coercive diplomacy in the world and make the international community better understand the hegemonic and bullying nature of US diplomacy, and the serious damages caused by US actions to the development of all countries, regional stability and world peace.

I. The United States' coercive diplomacy has a notorious record

In 1971, Alexander George, a professor at Stanford University, first put forward the concept of "coercive diplomacy," which was used to summarize the policies of the United States on Laos, Cuba and Vietnam. In his view, coercive diplomacy concerns the use of threat or limited force to coerce an adversary to stop or reverse its action. In the past half century, the US has never stopped engaging in coercive diplomacy in spite of great changes in the international structure. From economic sanctions to technical blockade, and from political isolation to threat of force, the US has demonstrated what coercive diplomacy is to the world with its own actions.

The developing countries are the "worst-hit areas" of America's coercive diplomacy. In 1962, the United States imposed an economic, commercial and financial embargo against Cuba which continues to this day. The US-Cuba diplomatic relations were restored in 2015, but the US did not fully lift its blockade against Cuba. In 2017, the Trump administration tightened sanctions on Cuba again. In 2021, the Biden administration twice extended the "Trading with the Enemy Act," which has served as the legal basis for the blockade and embargo against Cuba. The 61-year-old embargo has brought enormous economic losses and grave humanitarian disasters to Cuba. The US sanctions and blockade on Cuba cover almost everything from fuel, food and daily necessities to medicine, leaving the island facing a chronic and severe shortage of supplies. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States also blocked Cuba's access to raw materials for vaccine production. The People's World, an American news website, pointed out in an article that the blockade imposed by the United States had prevented Cuba from obtaining materials for the manufacture of syringes in time. Since the United States has banned third countries from selling ventilators to Cuba, Cuba has not been able to purchase the ventilators needed to save critically ill COVID-19 patients, which has caused great harm to the Cuban people.

Since 2006, the US has imposed sanctions on Venezuela, preventing Venezuela from entering the US financial system. During the Trump administration, the US expanded economic and financial sanctions against Venezuela, froze all assets of the Venezuelan government in the US, and imposed sanctions on its oil, banking, mining industries and more than 140 government personnel, which severely hit the Venezuelan economy. Venezuelan crude oil production fell from nearly 2.5 million barrels per day in 2016 to just 300,000 barrels per day in 2020. During the COVID-19 pandemic, US sanctions made it difficult for Venezuela to obtain materials to combat the pandemic and basic commodities such as food, drinking water and gasoline in a timely manner. According to the report released by the UN Special Rapporteur Du Han on the Negative Effects of Unilateral Enforcement Measures on Human Rights, the sanctions have left more than one-third of the population of Venezuela in a serious food crisis and a shortage of basic medical supplies and equipment; conditions of health care services have deteriorated and maternal, infant and seriously ill patients deaths have increased. In June 2020, the US Treasury Department announced the imposition of penalties on three Mexican entrepreneurs and eight Mexican companies, freezing their US assets, for allegedly helping Venezuela evade US sanctions, and prohibiting them from participating in any transaction involving US individuals and entities.

Since 2006, successive US administrations have continuously strengthened sanctions on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). Since 1988, the United States has for many years included the DPRK in the list of "state sponsors of terrorism." In 2016, then president Barack Obama signed the "North Korea Sanctions and Policy Enhancement Act" to supplement the sanctions already imposed by past administrations. In 2017, the US imposed further sanctions on the DPRK through the "Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act" and demanded that SWIFT cut off the DPRK banks from their global banking network. The US sanctions on the DPRK include restrictions on trade imports and exports, prohibition on the DPRK citizens from working overseas, freezing of assets in the US, and prohibition on economic ties with the DPRK. In November of the same year, three aircraft carriers of the US Navy, including USS *Reagan*, USS *Roosevelt* and USS *Nimitz*, appeared in the East China Sea at the same time and jointly held high-intensity military exercises with the South Korean Navy, which attracted great attention from the outside world.

Twice kicking Iran out of the SWIFT system and disrupting the international financial order. The United States first imposed economic sanctions against Iran in 1979, when it froze $1.2 billion worth of Iranian assets abroad and eventually expanding to a full trade embargo. As the Iranian nuclear issue has evolved, the US has banned Iranian financial institutions from using the US clearing and payment system to settle transactions in US dollars, forcing Iran to decouple from the US dollar. In 2012, in order to contain Iran in an all-round way, the United States and the European Union removed Iran from the SWIFT system, making it impossible for Iran to conduct cross-border transactions with the US dollar, the euro and any international currency, and the value of Iran's currency depreciated by about 38% in a year. Iran's foreign trade fell into recession, with imports and exports falling sharply and crude oil exports cut by half. In 2018, the Trump administration unilaterally withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal and once again kicked Iran out of the SWIFT system. According to a study by a US think tank, Iran has lost half of its oil exports and 30% of its foreign trade income due to the sanctions. The US government has wantonly

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wielded the club of sanctions against Iran, which has sparked criticism from all quarters. In 2019, Jake Sullivan, who is now national security advisor to President Joe Biden, wrote an article criticizing the Trump administration's policy toward Iran, saying that it has nothing but coercion and no diplomacy.

Sanctions imposed on Belarus. Since 2004, the United States has imposed 17 rounds of targeted sanctions on Belarus. Currently, 16 people, including Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, are under US sanctions ranging from travel bans to asset freezes. In addition, 10 Belarusian companies have been barred from the US market.

Unilateral sanctions imposed on African countries such as Sudan. In 1993, the United States announced sanctions against Sudan. In 1997, the Clinton administration announced sweeping economic sanctions against Sudan. In 2017, the US still added Sudan to the list of "state sponsors of terrorism," and various sanctions against Sudan continued to be implemented, including the prohibition on investments in, trade with, and loans to Sudan. Years of US sanctions have led to a severe humanitarian crisis in Sudan, with a large number of children across the country dying of malnutrition, according to a report released by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Sudan. In addition, the United States has imposed targeted sanctions against individuals and organizations in African countries such as Burundi, the Central African Republic, Somalia and Zimbabwe.

All-round sanctions on Russia. In 2014, the US issued a ban on medium and long-term financing of Russia's defense, financial and energy sectors. In April 2018, the US again announced sanctions against 38 Russian individuals and companies, freezing all their assets under US jurisdiction. In November 2021, the US announced further sanctions related to the Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline project. After the Russia-Ukraine conflict broke out, the US coerced many countries to issue the "Joint Statement on Further Restrictive Economic Measures" against Russia, banning the import of Russian crude oil, liquefied natural gas and coal, and restricting US investments in most Russian energy companies, while removing major Russian banks from SWIFT. To date, the United States and its allies have directly sanctioned more than 2,500 Russian companies, government officials and individuals.

Violating the principle of fair trade and imposing tariffs on China. In July 2018, the US launched a trade war with China, announcing a 25% tariff on approximately $34 billion of goods imported from China; in August, an additional 25% tariff on $16 billion worth of Chinese goods was announced; and in September, the US announced yet again a 10% tariff on $200 billion of Chinese imports. In May 2019, it was announced that tariffs on the $200 billion of Chinese goods would be raised from 10% to 25%; in August, it was announced that additional tariffs on about $550 billion of Chinese goods exported to the US would be raised, escalating the China-US trade war.

Tech blockade against China in the semiconductor sector. In August 2022, the "CHIPS and Science Act" was enacted. The law, which plans to provide up to $52.7 billion in government subsidies for the US semiconductor industry, requires semiconductor companies that receive federal financial aid not to make substantive expansion in countries such as China. The US government has joined Japan, South Korea and Chinese Taiwan to form the so-called "Chip 4" in an attempt to limit the development of China's semiconductor industry.

Using state power to suppress China's high-tech enterprises. The previous administration of the United States launched the "Clean Network" program, which took national security and privacy of its citizens as an excuse, explicitly requiring the elimination of Chinese enterprises such as Huawei, Baidu and Alibaba in five aspects, namely, telecommunications networks, mobile application stores, mobile application programs, cloud services and undersea cables. The then US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and other US politicians lobbied and coerced other countries and regions to join the so-called "Clean Network" alliance. Senior US officials even intimidated countries such as Cyprus, demanding that they not cooperate with Chinese 5G suppliers, or the consequences would be serious. The US has put more than 1,000 Chinese companies, including ZTE, Huawei and DJI, on various sanctions lists, using national security as an excuse to clamp down on Chinese social media apps such as TikTok and WeChat.

Under the guise of democracy and human rights, the US has hyped up questions concerning Taiwan, Hong Kong, Xinjiang. The "TAIPEI Act," the "Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act," the "Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act" and other bills related to China have been produced, and they are firmly linked to issues of trade and technological exchanges with China. It unjustifiably interferes in China's internal affairs and coerces Western countries into keeping with the US.

US hyped up the so-called "lab leak theory" of the coronavirus and spared no efforts to smear and stigmatize China. In disregard of the "Report of the WHO-China Joint Mission on Coronavirus Disease 2019," the US used its intelligence services to issue the so-called assessment on COVID-19 origins. The US insists on politicizing and taking advantage of the issue of tracing the origin of the virus, casting a shadow over global cooperation to combat the pandemic.

The US sanctioning Indian companies for engaging in oil trade with Iran for the first time. India's Economic Times, The Times of India and other media outlets reported that the US imposed sanctions on Mumbai-based petrochemical trading company Tibalaji Petrochem in October 2022, which marks the first time that US imposed sanctions on an Indian company for engaging in oil trade with Iran. In April 2023, the Indian Foreign Ministry announced that the governments of India and Malaysia had agreed to settle trade between the two countries in Indian rupees.

Applying coercive diplomacy with allies with no mercy. In the 1980s, Japan's GDP was half that of the US. In order to eliminate Japan's economic threat, the United States forced Japan to sign the "Plaza Accord" in 1985, forcing the yen to appreciate, which led to the rapid expansion of Japan's domestic economic bubble, the collapse of the real estate bubble and the long-term stagnation of the Japanese economy.

In 1986, in response to the rise of Japan's semiconductor industry, the US forced Japan to sign the "US-Japan Semiconductor Agreement," initiated a "Section 301 Investigation" against Japan, and imposed trade sanctions on a variety of Japanese products such as semiconductors and computers, which undermined the competitiveness and potential of Japan's semiconductor industry, seeing its market share fall from 50% of the global market to about 10% in 2019.

Dismembering Alstom by means of "economic hostages." In 2013, the US used the "Foreign Corrupt Practices Act" to arrest Frederic Pierucci, an Alstom executive, and coaxed him to enter into a plea agreement in order to obtain more evidence and information against Alstom. By 2014, to pressure Alstom, US authorities had arrested at least three more of Pierucci's former colleagues, using "economic hostages" as bargaining chips. Under lobbying and pressure, Alstom had to accept an acquisition bid from General Electric of the US in 2015. In its review, The Economist said the US Department of Justice investigation had distorted the process by which Alstom sold assets, creating an advantage for potential US buyers.

Wielding the tariff club at Europe and interfering in market competition. In 2018, the US government used Section 232 of the "Trade Expansion Act of 1962" to impose tariffs of up to 25% and 10% on steel and aluminum products respectively in several countries and regions, including the EU, purportedly on the grounds of safeguarding national security. In January 2021, to improve Boeing's competitive advantage, the US Customs and Border Protection announced tariffs of up to 15% on imports from France and Germany, including aircraft parts, involving a total value of $7.5 billion.

In recent years, the US has targeted its coercive measures on the semiconductor industry, "extorting" confidential data from many chip companies in the world and maintaining US dominance in the semiconductor industry. In September 2021, the US Department of Commerce issued a notice requiring companies in the semiconductor supply chain to provide relevant information "voluntarily" within 45 days, including 26 core items of data such as inventory, production capacity, supply cycle and customer information. In an interview with Reuters, US Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo said that if the companies refused, instruments such as the "Defense Production Act" would be used to get them to provide the data. Data from US government website shows that under pressure from the US, as of November 2021, more than 70 companies, including TSMC, UMC, Samsung, SK hynix and Japan's Sony Semiconductor, have submitted information related to the semiconductor supply chain to the US Department of Commerce.

In addition to the economic and financial sanctions, the US is also good at interfering, either directly or indirectly, in the internal affairs of other countries by supporting proxy wars, inciting civil wars, providing weapons and ammunition, and training anti-government forces, etc., to counter "disobedient" countries and regions. Since the 20th century, under the banner of "democracy" and "freedom," the United States has promoted the "Neo-Monroe Doctrine" in Latin America, provoked "color revolutions" in Eurasia, and planned the "Arab Spring" in West Asia and North Africa, engaging in "peaceful evolution" in various parts of the world, wantonly engaging in hegemonic bullying and sending out a clear message that whoever follows it will survive and whoever defies it shall perish.

Since 2003, the US has played a hand in the "Rose Revolution" in Georgia, the "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine and the "Tulip Revolution" in Kyrgyzstan. The Financial Times reported that agencies such as the US National Endowment for Democracy and the US Agency for International Development have been instrumental in driving domestic protests in other countries. The main and immediate cause of the color revolution is to safeguard US interests such as strategic expansion and energy security, according to a British Open Democracy Network article.

According to the American scholar Lindsey A. O'Rourke's *"Covert Regime Change: America's Secret Cold War"*, the United States carried out 64 covert regime change operations and six overt operations from 1947 to 1989. During the 1994 Haitian crisis, the US forced Haiti's military government to abandon power through a small-scale invasion. The administration at the time hailed the action as a model of coercive diplomacy. In 2003, the Bush administration listed 30.3 billion US dollars in additional military spending for coercive diplomacy. The US, despite being so angry about outside interference, is the expert in it, The Guardian said.

II. The United States has many means of coercive diplomacy

The hegemony of US dollar is an important foundation for US economic coercion. The "petrodollar," the "one-vote veto power" of the United States in the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and the bilateral currency swap led by the Federal Reserve are all concrete manifestations of the hegemony of the US dollar. As an international settlement currency, the US dollar accounts for the majority of global trade and investment, enabling the US to pass domestic economic problems onto other countries through export inflation and trade deficits. The US controls the pricing power of major global commodities and resources and can influence the economies and finances of other countries by controlling the exchange rate and interest rate of the US dollar. As a currency of international sanctions, the US dollar occupies a central position in the global financial system, enabling the US to cut off other countries' dollar supply and trading channels and impose pressure and sanction on other countries by restricting the channels of financing and transaction remittance. Freezing property, imposing huge fines and refusing financial services are all the usual tricks of the US to impose economic blockade and financial sanctions on other countries by taking advantage of the US dollar hegemony.

Trade control is an important means of US economic coercion. The United States has various forms of trade control, including sanctions, restrictions on imports and exports, imposition of tariffs, elimination of subsidies and quotas, and has set up a variety of trade control lists to fit different purposes and targets, including lists of specially designated nationals, lists of entities, unverified lists, lists of military end users, and lists of industry sanctions. The US often wantonly imposes tariff in disregard of international law and international trade rules, forcing other countries to engage in unequal trade negotiations with it. In recent years, the US has frequently restricted investment in telecommunications, semiconductor, artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies sectors on the grounds of "endangering national security," and included foreign entities or individuals in the entity list of export control, restricting their purchase of US technologies. Through the signing of executive orders, the US puts mandatory stops on foreign enterprises' operations in the US or prohibits US entities or individuals from trading with foreign enterprises, imposing technological sanctions on other countries, thus seriously undermining the international economic and trade order and the process of economic globalization.

"Long-arm jurisdiction" is another commonly used means of US economic coercion. The US has enacted such domestic laws as the "Foreign Corrupt Practices Act," the "Trading with the Enemy Act," the "Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act," the "International Emergency Economic Powers Act," and the "Export Control Act," and cooked up a series of executive orders, directly imposing sanctions on specific countries, organizations or individuals. The US arbitrarily expands the jurisdiction of its domestic law, while applying ambiguous rules such as the "minimum contact principle" and the "effectiveness principle," abusing domestic channels of judicial action to engage in "long-arm jurisdiction" with foreign entities and individuals.

The promotion of the so-called democracy and human rights is a common trick of the US to carry out political coercion and interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. The United States has long promoted "American values" worldwide, played up "democracy versus authoritarianism," wantonly interfered in the internal affairs of other countries, and attempted to shape other countries and world order with its own values and political system. They even interfere with and subvert the legitimate government of other countries in order to weaken rivals, pass on crisis, create chaos, and undermine stability.

The targets of US political coercion are all-encompassing. Be it an adversary or an ally, a developed or a developing country, a large corporation or a small organization, coercion is always the option for the US, as long as the US considers it profitable and the targets won't bend to the will of the US. The US, under the banner of "promoting democracy," carried out the "Neo-Monroe Doctrine" in Latin America, provoked the "color revolution" in Eurasia, and planned the "Arab Spring" in West Asia and North Africa.

US political coercion measures form an endless stream. The US uses its military bases, diplomatic agencies, intelligence agencies, non-governmental organizations, media organizations and other channels and resources according to different targets and situations-collecting information, exerting influence, creating public opinions, manipulating elections, supporting opposition parties, etc. to publicly and secretly, directly and indirectly, interfere in the internal affairs of other countries.

A powerful military supports US in coercive diplomacy. The United States frequently utilizes military coercion and wanton use of force in international relations. In recent years, the average annual military budget of the United States has exceeded $700 billion, accounting for 40% of the world's total and exceeding the sum of the next 15 countries combined. The US is the world's largest arms exporter, and it often relies on arms trafficking to boost revenue and provoke regional conflicts. US military facilities and personnel are located in all corners and key areas of the globe. According to a 2020 report on US overseas military bases, the US has more than 800 military bases around the world, with 173,000 people deployed in 159 countries across Europe, Asia, the Middle East and beyond.

The US frequently uses military force to initiate or participate in wars and conflicts of all sizes and forms. Between 1776 and 2019, the US conducted nearly 400 military interventions worldwide, half of which occurred between 1950 and 2019, according to the Tufts University report, "Introducing the Military Intervention Project: A New Dataset on US Military Interventions." After World War II, major wars initiated or launched by the US include the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, the Kosovo War, the Afghan War, the Iraq War, the Libyan War and the Syrian War. Proxy wars are a common form of US military interventions, with countries such as Ukraine, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Pakistan and Yemen suffering. According to the "Cost of War" project data of the Watson Institute at Brown University, conservative estimates show that the total number of military and civilian deaths caused by the US wars in the "post-9/11 era" is as high as 929,000, with at least 38 million people displaced.

The soft powers of culture and science and technology are the covert means for the US to engage in ideological infiltration and coercive diplomacy. The US-led Western media and international social media have forcefully propped up and supported US coercive diplomacy. The US pursues double standards on freedom of the press and uses various means to smear and suppress foreign media outlets. The US abused its cultural hegemony, invested heavily in the media sector, supported its infiltration of ideas into other countries, and carried out inflammatory propaganda. Moreover, the US is used to fabricating false information to attack other countries, and peddling misleading public opinion globally using a purposefully built industrial chain.

The United States uses its cultural products to promote American values. Hollywood films account for more than 70% of the world's market share. The values and lifestyle of the US are closely linked to its films and television programs, publications, media content, and programs of government-funded nonprofit cultural institutions, shaping a space for public opinion that sustains American cultural hegemony. It has seriously eroded the independence of other cultures and the diversity of world cultures.

US intelligence agencies have established a large number of "infiltration organizations" around the world. Various foundations and non-governmental organizations have become "middlemen" in exporting American values and "pioneers" in cultural infiltration. The National Endowment for Democracy, the Congress for Cultural Freedom and other American "infiltration organizations" and institutions have promoted American cultural and political views to other countries through financial support, training, publication and conference, to export American values and ideology to the world, and to pursue cultural hegemony.

III. The United States' coercive diplomacy endangers the whole world

Distorting the underlying theme of our times of peace and development. Peace and development, as the theme of our times, are the common cause for people of all countries around the world. The pursuit of peace is the eternal ideal and wish of mankind, and economic globalization is the realistic precondition of world peace. However, in recent years, under the guidance of the concept of "America First," US hegemony, unilateralism, protectionism, isolationism and nationalism has become increasingly fierce. The US, taking its own interests first, disregards the urgent needs of all countries in the world for peace and development. It is keen to manipulate ideological issues, engage in zero-sum games, and set up various geographical "small cliques." The US coercive diplomacy has cast a shadow over the cause of global peace and development by instigating "color revolutions" in the world, pouring oil over fire and seeking interests from geopolitical struggles.

Disrupting the process of economic globalization and regional economic integration. Increasingly engaging in economic coercion around the world, the US has seriously undermined economic globalization and regional economic integration, resulting in the artificial segmentation and further fragmentation of the world economy. This has seriously reversed the course of economic globalization. In order to maintain its hegemony, the US is withdrawing from the pattern of global cooperation formed after World War II and has actually become the biggest disruptor of the rules of globalization. The WTO was almost paralyzed by US inaction, and the trend of global trade and investment liberalization and integration was blocked and undermined by the US. The US economic coercion has not only undermined global supply chains and industrial chains based on factor endowments and comparative advantages, reducing labor productivity, but also raised regional and even global production costs and hindered the process of regional economic integration.

Hindering the development of emerging economies and developing countries represented by the BRICS countries. The economic sanctions and blockade imposed by the United States on developing countries such as Venezuela, Cuba, Myanmar and Syria have directly interrupted the sustainable development process of these countries. In these countries, the vast majority of the 17 goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the eradication of all forms of poverty throughout the world, the eradication of hunger, the realization of sustainable economic growth, sustainable industrialization, the reduction of inequality within and between countries, and sustainable cities and human settlements have been put out of reach by US coercion, and the cause of global development has repeatedly been frustrated. Economic sanctions imposed by the US on the BRICS countries, namely, China, Russia, India, Brazil and South Africa and emerging markets such as Argentina, Mexico and Turkey have severely harmed their economic interests.

Intensifying division and antagonism in the international community. In order to maintain its global hegemony and contain the development of other countries, the US is keen to force other countries to join the "democratic alliance" by means of drawing ideological lines and imposing tariffs. Using the Ukraine crisis, the US rallies the European Union and other developed countries to join in on the sanctions against Russia, and coerces developing countries to take sides. It coerces European allies to join the US in continuing to impose sanctions on Iran, which has severely affected the livelihood and economic development of Iran. What the US has done has intensified the antagonism in the international community and raised the risk of the world falling into a new Cold War.

Conclusion

The United States is the inventor and master of coercive diplomacy. For a long time, the US, through various rogue means such as economic blockade, unilateral sanctions, military threats, political isolation, and technical blockade, has presented textbook cases of coercive diplomacy to the world. As US scholars have pointed out, the essence of US coercive diplomacy lies in the idea that "you are either with us or against us. The US should lead, and its allies should follow, and the countries that oppose the supremacy of the US will suffer."

Shrugging off the fact that the US itself has engaged in coercive diplomacy everywhere, the US, out of political self-interest, readily tags China and other countries with the label of coercive diplomacy. It needs to be pointed out that an important tradition in China's diplomacy is to uphold the equality of all countries large and small, and never to divide the world into different groups or engage in the practice of coercion and bullying. Moreover, China has always taken a clear-cut stand against hegemony, unilateralism and coercive diplomacy. China never threatens other countries with force. China never forms military coalition or exports ideology. China never makes provocations at others' doorstep or reaches its hands into others' homes. China never wages trade wars or groundlessly hobbles foreign companies. To slander China for engaging in the so-called coercive diplomacy is obviously just making trumped-up charges.

The international community can easily tell who is engaging in coercive diplomacy and who is coercing the whole world. Those who engage in coercion, sanctions, bullying, suppressing other countries and bringing chaos to the world, will eventually hurt themselves. The United States should address its old habit of wanton coercive diplomacy and return a just and rational international order to the world.

—XINHUA

From left: A contest for innovation and entrepreneurship is recently held in the city of Taiyuan. RUAN YANG / FOR CHINA DAILY Taiyuan Iron and Steel Group is one of the very few manufacturers in the world that can produce steel foil with a thickness of less than 0.02 millimeters. SUN RONGXIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY Workers producing components for high-altitude meteorological monitoring equipment at the Taiyuan No 1 Radio Appliances Works. RUAN YANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Shanxi boasts stable socioeconomic progress

China Shanxi

Clockwise from top: The Fenhe River in Taiyuan is an example of Shanxi's environmental improvement. LIU TONG / FOR CHINA DAILY Daylily farming is now a major source of revenue for farmers in Yunzhou district of Datong city. WANG ZHONGXUN / FOR CHINA DAILY Tourists take pictures under blooming sakura trees during a tourism festival in Taiyuan's Wanbailin district. LI ZHAOMIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Responding to the central authorities' guidelines on high-quality development, the North China province of Shanxi has made all-around progress in various socioeconomic areas in recent years.

Local officials said that breakthroughs have been made in areas including economic transformation, the construction of a comprehensive energy base, optimization of the business environment, and improvements in the ecological environment and people's livelihoods.

In the first three months of this year, Shanxi reported an economic increase higher than the national average, showcasing a strong recovery from the three-year COVID-19 pandemic, officials said.

They added that, with the stable transition from the pandemic prevention and control situation, Shanxi's economic operations started well in the first quarter, showing a trend of resilience and stabilization.

They noted that sticking to the guidelines proposed by China's central authorities is the major reason for the stability of Shanxi's overall socioeconomic development.

The central authorities have made regular tours of Shanxi over recent years, studying the situations of local socioeconomic operations and giving instructions on Shanxi's high-quality growth, especially in the fields of reform and opening-up, economic transformation, rural vitalization, ecological civilization, livelihood improvement, cultural development and governance.

Shanxi's provincial authorities deem that the central authorities' guidelines on development, especially those relating to the new growth patterns and high-quality development, are inspiring and worthy of study by officials, entrepreneurs and people in all walks of life.

The study of the guidelines has led to the formation of implementation measures to boost development and solutions to problems arising from various socioeconomic areas, local officials said.

Transformation

The officials said the central authorities have endorsed Shanxi's practice in economic transformation and noted that innovation is the key.

Shanxi began to implement an economic transformation plan more than a decade ago. The plan required upgrading the traditional industries like coal mining, steelmaking and machinery toward the directions of higher efficiency and cleaner and safer operations. On the other hand, it called for efforts to diversify Shanxi's economic operations by fostering emerging sectors and creating new growth engines.

The plan was approved by the State Council in 2010, and Shanxi became a pilot region for the nation's reform of resource-reliant economies.

Taiyuan Iron and Steel Group, the leading steelmaker in Shanxi, is one example of the successful transformation of a traditional industry.

During their research tours of the company, China's central authorities have been impressed with its cutting-edge products like "hand-torn" steel and encouraged its staff members to continue their efforts in innovation to ensure its successful transformation and sustainable development.

Hand-torn steel is a popular reference to the superthin broadsheet stainless steel foil. With a thickness of less than 0.02 millimeters, or one-third of the diameter of a human hair, the product can be easily torn apart by hand.

According to a company executive, Taiyuan Iron and Steel is among the very few manufacturers in the world that can produce steel foil with such delicacy. It is produced for applications in specific industries including aerospace, electronics, petrochemicals and automobiles.

The company successfully developed the 0.02-mm product variety in 2018, breaking the monopoly of foreign suppliers on the Chinese market.

Taiyuan Iron and Steel continued technological innovation in the years to come, with the latest variety reaching a thickness of 0.015 mm.

"The growing capacity in technological innovation has made it possible for our company to be competitive with more higher-value-added products," a company executive said.

Taiyuan Iron and Steel is at the top of Shanxi's steel industry chain. It is helping to extend the chain through its vigorous development, which has offered ample opportunities for upstream suppliers and downstream manufacturers to grow.

The practice of extending and enhancing industry chains through the spillover effect of the development of leading industry players is Shanxi's new strategy for economic transformation, echoing the guidance of the central authorities.

One initiative in the province is to foster 10 competitive industry chains through backing dozens of leading players in these sectors. Enterprises like Taiyuan Iron and Steel are receiving strong support from the provincial and local authorities for their role in enhancing their corresponding industry chains.

Another move to strengthen industry chains is developing characteristic towns with advantageous local specialty industries.

The government of Shanxi released a list of the first batch of characteristic towns or counties in September 2022. Ten towns and counties were on the list, including Xinghuacun township in Fenyang city for its white liquor; Qingxu county for its matured vinegar; Dingxiang county for its flange products; and Pingyao county for its beef and hand-polished lacquerware.

Shanxi is also vigorously developing the digital economy to offer strong support to the province's economic transformation. It is reported that Shanxi's digital economy has reached a scale of 500 billion yuan ($71.45 billion) in terms of output value.

Energy revolution

Shanxi is one of the leading coal mining regions in China, so central authorities have given Shanxi the double missions of ensuring national energy security and piloting an energy revolution campaign to help the nation realize its sustainability and low-carbon targets.

When it comes to ensuring national energy security, Shanxi produced more than 1.3 billion metric tons of coal in 2022, ranking first in the country. Of that output, about 620 million tons were supplied to 24 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions other than Shanxi. In addition, Shanxi's coal-fired power plants also supplied a large amount of electricity to the rest of the country.

As a major energy base in China and a pilot zone for energy industry transformation, Shanxi is now implementing an energy revolution campaign, which features the upgrading of traditional coal mining, coking and coal-fired power generation industries and promoting the development of clean, renewable energy resources.

As a result of industrial upgrades driven by digital, intelligent and environmentally friendly technologies, about 80 percent of Shanxi's coal output in 2022 was produced by advanced facilities with cleaner, safer and more efficient operations.

Shanxi is among the country's leaders in the development of new and clean energy resources. Latest statistics show that the province's installed capacity of new-energy power plants reached 49 million kilowatts, accounting for 40.25 percent of Shanxi's total.

Demonstration zone

The Shanxi Transformation and Comprehensive Reform Demonstration Zone, located in the cities of Taiyuan and Jinzhong, is the first pilot zone in the country serving Shanxi's transition from a resource-reliant economy. Its role in backing Shanxi's economic transformation has been recognized by the State authorities during their visits.

Established in 2017, the demonstration zone is a major destination for hosting emerging industries and a site to cultivate new growth engines for Shanxi. It has developed such emerging industries as advanced manufacturing, the digital economy, biomedicines, new energy vehicles, electronic information, smart logistics, modern agriculture and environmental protection.

Over the past decade, the zone has also grown into a leading benchmark destination for Shanxi's investment promotion.

This year, the zone has 44 of the largest projects on the provincial list of key investment projects.

It is also a pacesetter in Shanxi's practice of improving the business environment.

The zone has devoted much energy to creating a predictable, reliable and sustainable business environment for enterprises based on the principles of the rule of law and market orientation and according to international standards and practices.

It has implemented a number of measures to streamline business approval procedures, reduce administrative service costs, and improve administrative service efficiency through the use of online platforms and digital technologies, as well as whole-process assistance from officials to help businesses grow.

Its recent pledge to investors is that the period between agreement signing and project construction will be shortened to 58 days, compared with 238 days in the past.

The demonstration zone's many pilot practices have been taken up in other development zones and industrial parks in Shanxi, making them major drivers for local economic growth.

It is reported that Shanxi's 71 zones and parks reported a combined industrial incremental value of 390.62 billion yuan in 2022, growing 14.2 percent from 2021. The amount accounted for 31.5 percent of Shanxi's total industrial incremental value and the growth rate was 6.2 percentage points higher than the provincial average.

Livelihood improvement

The leaders of Shanxi have put improving people's livelihoods high on their agenda according to the requirements of China's central authorities.

On many occasions when they visited Shanxi, the central authorities called on local officials to stick to a people-centered philosophy of governance and allow residents to enjoy the fruits of development.

Improving the quality of life for rural and urban residents has been highlighted by the Shanxi authorities.

The province has carried out a decadeslong poverty alleviation campaign for its rural residents. Thanks to the targeted measures such as relocating residents from locations with adverse living environments and creating job and business opportunities through developing local characteristic industries, Shanxi announced the elimination of absolute poverty in early 2021.

Since then, Shanxi has entered a new era of rural vitalization, allowing residents to further improve their livelihoods in a sustainable manner.

Latest statistics show that the per capita disposable income of rural residents reached 4,386 yuan in the first quarter of this year, increasing 6.4 percent from the same period of 2022. This growth rate is also 0.3 percentage point higher than the national average.

In both rural and urban areas of Shanxi, people can sense the changes for the better in their lives day by day. The transformations are demonstrated in the areas like broadened coverage of government-sponsored systems of pension, healthcare and unemployment insurance, as well as free compulsory education for children and the improvement of infrastructure.

A sound ecological environment is also crucial to improving the quality of life.

During their visits to Shanxi, the central authorities expressed their expectations for Shanxi to become a more livable place featuring "clear skies, clean waters and lushly vegetated mountains".

According to the requirements of the central authorities, Shanxi has carried out various initiatives to protect its environment. One of the moves is to implement a strategy to become an experimental zone for ecological protection and high-quality development of the Yellow River drainage area since 2017.

Years of efforts has yielded results. In 2022, 82.8 percent of the water bodies of the Yellow River and its tributaries were tested as having good or excellent water quality, according to data collected in 58 monitoring stations across the province. The rate represented an increase of 16.7 percentage points compared with 2021.

In addition to water quality improvement, positive results have been reported in almost all fronts of environmental protection, from curbing pollution from industrial plants and treating rural household sewage to restoring wetland ecology and planting trees on the mountains.

The provincial department of ecology and environment recently said that all the environmental indexes of Shanxi reached the best levels in history in 2022.

WORLD

Beijing opposes attempts to meddle in cross-Strait peace

By **WANG QINGYUN**
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China, which cherishes peace across the Taiwan Strait, will not allow anyone to meddle in its domestic affairs under the guise of maintaining peace, Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said on Thursday.

Those who seek cross-Strait peace without opposing "Taiwan independence" separatist moves will only encourage and embolden the separatists, and bring about more damage to peace and stability across the Strait, Wang said at a regular news conference.

Wang made the remarks after Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said in an interview with NHK that he wants to send a message at the upcoming Group of Seven Summit that the Taiwan question should be resolved peacefully through dialogue.

According to reports by Japanese media, G7 member countries are coordinating on including the content of "the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait" in the summit declaration.

The real threat to cross-Strait peace and stability lies in the Democratic Progressive Party authority's unwillingness to recognize the 1992 Consensus, its persistence in promoting "Taiwan independence" and the attempt to change the status quo that both sides across the Strait belong to one and the same China, Wang said.

The United States and Japan are responsible for tensions across the Strait, as they have been obscuring and hollowing out the one-China principle and collaborating with "Taiwan independence" separatist forces in political, military and economic dimensions, Wang said.

Cross-Strait peace requires unequivocal adherence to the one-China principle and resolute objection to provocations by "Taiwan independence" forces, the spokesman said.

"Those who talk about peaceful resolution of the Taiwan question without mentioning the need to support China's reunification are actually trying to impede China's reunification and create 'peaceful division,'" he said.

China is committed to striving for peaceful reunification with the greatest sincerity and utmost effort, the spokesman said. "But we will not accept any attempt by anyone or any force to use maintaining cross-Strait peace as an excuse to curb our efforts to stop 'Taiwan independence' separatist moves," he said.

Wang urged the US, Japan and other G7 member states to observe the bilateral political documents they have signed with China, follow the one-China principle, stop supporting "Taiwan independence" forces and stop making provocations. "Those who play with fire will get burned," he warned.

Monks' day out

Boys, who are experiencing the lives of Buddhist monks by staying in a temple for three weeks as novice monks, enjoy a ride at Everland Amusement Park in Yongin, South Korea, on Wednesday. KIM SOO-HYEON / REUTERS

French first lady visits giant panda 'godson'

By **CHEN WEIHUA** in Brussels
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French first lady Brigitte Macron appeared emotional when she paid a surprise three-hour visit on Wednesday to her "godson" Yuan Meng, a giant panda in the Beauval Park Zoo, about 200 kilometers southwest of Paris.

The first giant panda born in France on Aug 4, 2017, Yuan Meng is scheduled to return to China's Giant Panda Research and Reproduction Center in Chengdu on July 4 to join the conservation program and "breed with an unrelated female", zoo director Rodolphe Delord said.

"Yuan Meng will soon go back to China, that's why I wanted to be here today," said the wife of French President Emmanuel Macron, who was accompanied by Secretary of State for Ecology Berangere Couillard.

'Little pinch'

"I will try to go see him maybe once there. But now, I have a little pinch in my heart."

Yuan Meng was born through artificial insemination to his parents Yuan Zi and Huan Huan, who arrived in France in 2012.

"I have known Yuan Meng for five and a half years, and every time I see him, this same emotion comes back," said Brigitte, who is known as Yuan Meng's "godmother".

"I have a hard time analyzing it. It generates a feeling of zenitude. We look at it and we don't want to be anywhere else. But why, I don't know."

Yuan Meng survived after his birth in 2017, but his fragile twin brother, born 14 minutes earlier, unfortunately died just a few hours after birth.

Beauval Park Zoo announced Yuan Meng's impending departure in May. A zoo public relations official told China Daily that they are planning a farewell event for Yuan Meng's fans, but the date has yet to be decided.

The French first lady also went to see Yuandudu and Huanlili, twin panda sisters of Yuan Meng born in the zoo on Aug 2, 2021.

French football star Kylian Mbappe and Chinese Olympic diving gold medalist Zhang Jiaqi were named "godfather" and "godmother" of the twins, while attending the naming ceremony for the twins in November 2021.

Most giant pandas around the world are on loan from China. According to the loan agreement, cubs born abroad have to be sent to the Chinese breeding program before they turn 4 to expand the gene pool. Yuan Meng's return has been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the World Wildlife Fund, there are 1,864 giant pandas living in the wild and an additional 400 living in captivity.

Its population has started to increase slightly due to the breeding programs in China.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature now lists the giant panda as "vulnerable", a category between "near threatened" and "endangered".

Agencies contributed to this story.

Apocalyptic floods

Rescuers evacuate a woman with an inflatable boat in Forli on Wednesday after exceptional rains batter central Italy's drought-struck Emilia-Romagna region. At least nine people died and 12,000 were forced to flee their homes as downpours flooded rivers and submerged entire neighborhoods and farmland, prompting the cancellation of this weekend's Imola Grand Prix. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Montana's TikTok ban draws strong outrage

Hurdles ahead as law raises questions of enforceability, real motive behind act

By **LIA ZHU** in San Francisco
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Montana Governor Greg Gianforte signed a bill on Wednesday banning TikTok in the state, making it the first state in the United States to ban the social media app completely and drawing wide outrage from industry experts and civil rights groups.

Montana legislators passed a bill last month banning TikTok on all personal devices, prohibiting it from operating within the state and barring app stores from offering the app for download.

The measure is the most sweeping one compared with other states' attempts to curtail TikTok.

Montana's ban on TikTok has been a topic of heated discussion, as it is likely to be challenged in courts for violating free speech rights and the difficulty — or even impossibility — of enforcing it.

Since its introduction, the bill has drawn outrage from industry experts and civil rights groups who have called on Gianforte to veto the bill. Despite the pushback, the governor signed the bill into law and said it was "to protect Montanans' personal and private data" in a Twitter post.

His post received many comments, most of which question the enforceability and the real motive behind the measure. Quite a number of users sarcastically wished the governor "good luck", as they see major hurdles ahead.

"Good luck with that. I don't need or want your 'protection'," Twitter user ImpossibleK wrote.

Responding to the governor's tweet, another user Blythe Woolston said, "Certain to be challenged as an infringement of free speech and practically unenforceable in any case."

The ban goes into effect in January 2024. It does not specify how the state would enforce or monitor it. Some said people can easily circumvent the ban by using a VPN, or virtual private network.

Defending users' rights

In a statement, TikTok said it would push to defend the rights of users in Montana.

"Governor Gianforte has signed a bill that infringes on the First Amendment rights of the people of Montana by unlawfully banning TikTok, a platform that empowers hundreds of thousands of people across the state," the company said in a statement.

"We want to reassure Montanans that they can continue using TikTok to express themselves, earn a living, and find community as we continue working to defend the rights of our users inside and outside of Montana."

The popular social media app now has 150 million monthly active users in the US. It has been under increased scrutiny over "national security" issues because its parent company ByteDance is based in Beijing.

The administration of former president Donald Trump tried to ban TikTok in 2020, but the attempts were blocked in court due in part to free speech concerns.

US President Joe Biden's administration initially shelved those plans, but has more recently threatened to ban the app if the company's Chinese owners do not sell their stakes.

Wednesday's ban has renewed pushback from industry and rights groups. NetChoice, a technology trade group that includes TikTok as a member, called the Montana bill unconstitutional.

"The government may not block our ability to access constitutionally protected speech — whether it is in a newspaper, on a website or via an app. In implementing this law, Montana ignores the US Constitution, due process and free speech by denying access to a website and apps their citizens want to use," said Carl Szabo, NetChoice's general counsel.

The American Civil Liberties Union said in a statement, "With this ban, Governor Gianforte and the Montana legislature have trampled on the free speech of hundreds of thousands of Montanans who use the app to express themselves, gather information, and run their small business in the name of anti-Chinese sentiment."

Plastic reminder

A woman takes pictures of the Obelisk covered with plastic bags as part of an artistic installation on the eve of World Recycling Day in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on Tuesday. LUIS ROBAYO / AFP

China's role in pandemic fight hailed

By **ZHAO RUINAN**
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China has stood out and played a significant role in the global fight against the COVID-19 pandemic over the past three years, experts and officials said.

The remarks were made on Thursday in Beijing at the launch ceremony of a report titled International Development Cooperation: China's Practice. The report, issued by the China International Development Cooperation Agency, or CIDCA, detailed China's efforts in combating COVID-19 and providing international emergency humanitarian assistance in the past three years.

"Looking back on the past three years, international cooperation has become the most powerful weapon in the world's response to COVID-19, which has triggered the most severe recession in nearly a century, and China has made great contributions," Zhong Haidong, vice-chairman of the CIDCA, said.

On May 5, the World Health Organization declared that the spread of COVID-19 was no longer a global public health emergency. According to the United Nations, nearly 7 million people have died from the virus worldwide since the WHO first declared the emergency on Jan 30, 2020.

China's efforts have instilled confidence and hope in the international fight against the pandemic, said Zhong, adding that China has also helped developing countries deal with the global health emergency and bridge the global immunization gap by providing vaccines.

Medical aid

According to the report, China has provided billions of test kits, protective clothing, masks and other supplies to 151 countries and 13 international organizations around the world. It has also shipped a total of 5,246 metric tons of pandemic supplies.

China has so far delivered 520 million COVID-19 vaccine doses to 110 countries and four international organizations, including the Arab League, the African Union, UN peacekeepers and the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the document said.

Muhammad Hasanein Khaddam, Syrian ambassador to China, said China "stood out as an exemplary case of humanity in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic".

"China's assistance ... was offered to those who needed it, and Syria was on the long list of recipients of the Chinese aid that included medical supplies and nearly 3 million doses of COVID vaccines," he said.

Medical assistance is only one part of China's global emergency humanitarian assistance. Recent years have witnessed frequent natural disasters, public health incidents and humanitarian catastrophes, and China has never stopped extending its helping hand, Zhong said.

According to the report, China spent a total of 15.2 billion yuan ($2.16 billion) on 822 foreign emergency humanitarian aid projects from 2018 to 2022.

Khaddam also thanked China's immediate response in the wake of the Feb 6 earthquake that claimed more than 41,000 lives in Turkiye and Syria.

Briefly

SAUDI ARABIA

Neighbors welcome Syria's return to league

Arab foreign ministers welcomed Syria back to the Arab League on Wednesday and called for a ceasefire in conflict-hit Sudan ahead of the organization's annual summit in Saudi Arabia. This year's summit, starting on Friday in the city of Jeddah, will mark the readmittance of war-torn Syria into the 22-member league after a 12-year suspension. Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan said on Wednesday that the region is at a crossroads, facing a host of challenges. He called for cooperation among Arab countries to achieve security, stability and economic prosperity.

UNITED KINGDOM

Harry, Meghan car chase 'dangerous'

Prince Harry and his wife Meghan were pursued in their car by photographers after a charity event in New York, an incident that the mayor and the couple's office described on Wednesday as potentially dangerous and stirred memories of the 1997 car crash that killed Harry's mother, Princess Diana. With the help of police, they were eventually able to switch to a taxi cab and be whisked away, according to a law enforcement official who was not authorized to speak publicly about the matter and did so on condition of anonymity. Harry and Meghan's office said in a statement that the chase "resulted in multiple near collisions involving other drivers on the road, pedestrians and two NYPD officers". It called the incident "near catastrophic".

JAPAN

Military hospital to treat Ukrainian soldiers

Japan is set to receive injured Ukrainian soldiers at a Tokyo hospital run by its military, a senior member of Japan's ruling coalition said on Thursday. It would be the first time the Self-Defense Forces Central Hospital will treat foreign soldiers, the lawmaker told Reuters, requesting anonymity because the deal is not yet public. Details were expected to be decided at a meeting between Japanese Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada and Ukrainian Ambassador to Japan Sergiy Korsunsky later on Thursday, but costs will likely be shouldered mostly by the Japanese side, the lawmaker added.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Kazakhstan Special

Leading airline from the center of Eurasia

Aviation company boosts cooperation in Chinese market

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Air Astana is the flag carrier of Kazakhstan. Its two major shareholders are the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and BAE Systems PLC of the United Kingdom.

Air Astana commenced operations in May 2002. In the same year the airline had its inaugural flight to the Chinese market and since then has gradually expanded its route network in China. Before the pandemic, it operated four direct passenger routes between Kazakhstan and China, respectively from Almaty, its economic hub, and Astana, its capital, to Beijing and Urumqi.

With the gradual recovery of the international aviation market in China, Air Astana resumed its Beijing-Almaty and Beijing-Astana direct flights in November 2022 and March 2023, and now operates six and one flights per week respectively. These routes are operated by the company's brand-new Airbus A321 long- range fleet with a greatly enhanced cabin and facilities for passengers.

Transiting via Almaty or Astana, passengers can travel with Air Astana to further destinations, such as Tashkent, Dushanbe, Bishkek, Tbilisi, Baku, Istanbul, London and Dubai. For transfer passengers in Almaty or Astana, the company offers its Stopover Holiday program, which includes a one night stay in a three to four star hotel, buffet breakfast and airport transfer.

Since July 8, 2022, Chinese citizens can enjoy a 14-day visa-free regime to Kazakhstan given that they have a return ticket within that period. It is expected that soon visa-free policy will be also applied for Kazakhstan citizens to China. These policies will bring great convenience to people travelling between China and Kazakhstan, and further promote the resumption of flights between the two countries.

As the first four-star airline in Central Asia and the Commonwealth of Independent States awarded by Skytrax, and the Best Airline in Central Asia and CIS awarded 10 times in a row, Air Astana is committed to providing the highest-quality service to its passengers.

With its excellent on-board entertainment system, the company recently received an APEX Award in the "Best entertainment system in Central and South Asia".

In addition, Air Astana complies to the highest standards of safety, certified by the European Aviation Safety Agency EASA Part 145 and by the IATA Operating Safety Audit, or IOSA, since 2007.

In May 2019, Air Astana launched its subsidiary, FlyArystan, one of the first true low-cost airlines in the Central Asia region. FlyArystan has been a huge success with 366 percent growth since its inception, significantly increasing Air Astana Group's share of the domestic market and injecting new vitality into the group.

Today, Air Astana Group has 43 Western aircraft with an average age of 5.3 years. The fleet consists of Boeing 767, Airbus A320neo, Airbus A321, Airbus A321neo, A321LR, and Embraer E190-E2 aircraft. Air Astana Group operates over 90 domestic and international routes.

ADVERTORIAL

Greater China-Kazakhstan ties set to produce fruitful results

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Economic and trade ties between China and Kazakhstan will continue to expand in the years ahead, thanks to joint efforts to improve regional connectivity and launch new projects in areas like energy development, logistics and agriculture, said market watchers and business leaders.

They said that the two countries, amid increasing pressure on the global economy, have not only helped to ensure the stability of Eurasian production cooperation and the smooth operation of the China-Europe freight train service but also effectively addressed global energy security challenges.

With improved connectivity projects such as the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route and new railway express services, China and Kazakhstan still have room to further strengthen the docking of their development strategies, and expand new areas for cooperation, especially in the fields of 5G, big data, digital finance, cross-border e-commerce and green energy, said Zhou Lei, a researcher specializing in regional economic development at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing.

The Trans-Caspian International Transport Route is a rail freight corridor linking China and the European Union through Central Asia, the Caucasus, Turkiye, and Eastern Europe, according to Tokyo-based Asian Development Bank Institute.

"The enhanced rail and road transportation networks between China and Kazakhstan will bring up a win-win situation as China has huge demand for imports from the Central Asian country. It will boost the job market and industrial upgrading in Kazakhstan," said Tian Dewen, deputy director of the Institute of Russian, Eastern European and Central Asian Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing.

> "The enhanced rail and road transportation networks between China and Kazakhstan will bring up a win-win situation as China has huge demand for imports from the Central Asian country."
>
> **Tian Dewen,** deputy director of the Institute of Russian, Eastern European and Central Asian Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

Central Asia, especially Kazakhstan, has served as a key gateway on the western route for China-Europe freight train services.

Thanks to their complementary trade structure, China and Kazakhstan saw their foreign trade value jump 23.6 percent on a yearly basis to $31.17 billion in 2022, while China's imports from Kazakhstan surged 31.1 percent year-on-year, data from the General Administration of Customs showed.

Bilateral trade soared 26.8 percent from the same period in 2022 to $8.23 billion in the first quarter of this year.

Hu Biliang, executive dean of the Belt and Road School at Beijing Normal University, said China and Kazakhstan, among the first countries to jointly pursue cooperation in terms of the Belt and Road Initiative, have implemented a series of projects with strategic significance, bringing benefits to their peoples and setting a convincing example for the international community.

China National Chemical Engineering Corp announced in January that it completed an integrated petrochemicals complex and infrastructure project in the Atyrau region, western Kazakhstan, in November 2022.

This big-ticket project will be a pilot of the alignment of the Belt and Road Initiative and Kazakhstan's economic growth policies. It is Kazakhstan's largest chemical and the first polyolefin project, said Wu Xiangong, CNCEC's vice-president.

As a key cooperation project between Kazakhstan and China, the complex will produce up to 500,000 metric tons of polypropylene per year, a raw material widely used in mechanical engineering, medicine and electrical engineering.

Wu said it took the group nearly five years to complete the project's construction. It included design, purchase, and engineering as well as performance assessment of propane dehydrogenation-based propylene production and polypropylene production facilities.

The Shelek Wind Farm in Kazakhstan, a key project of the Belt and Road Initiative, was also put into operation in September 2022.

Jointly invested and built by Beijing-headquartered Power Construction Corp of China, or PowerChina, and Samuk-Energy Joint Stock, Kazakhstan's largest state-owned energy development company, the wind farm is the first new energy project that PowerChina has invested in Central Asia.

Congratulations on the success of the first China-Central Asia Summit
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Uzbekistan Special

Industrial supply chains and trade set to bring nations closer together

By YUAN SHENGGAO

China and Uzbekistan — two staunch advocates of multilateralism — are poised to boost two-way trade and enhance regional connectivity in the next phase of their partnership, stimulating high-quality growth in their business ties, said experts and business executives.

In spite of the gloomy global outlook and international geopolitical tensions, they said promoting industrial and investment cooperation between the two countries will keep up with the general trend around the globe, promote economic transformation and pursue win-win development.

Uzbekistan plays a key role in regional industrial and supply chains, and China has become the largest contributor to global economic growth, said Zhao Ping, vice-dean of the Beijing-based Academy of China Council for the Promotion of International Trade.

Looking ahead, Zhao said China and Uzbekistan should push to accelerate industrial upgrading and transformation, create a better business environment and maintain stable and safe regional industrial and supply chains.

"More efforts should also be made to develop next-generation information technologies, such as artificial intelligence, industrial internet, big data and the internet of things; accelerate the smart and green transformation of traditional industries and expand cooperation in the areas of trade, investment, cross-border e-commerce and transportation," said Zhang Yongjun, deputy chief economist at the Beijing-based China Center for International Economic Exchanges.

Benefiting from the tangible growth of the Belt and Road Initiative and economic and trade activities, China and Uzbekistan saw their trade value soar 25.5 percent year-on-year to 65.13 billion yuan ($9.41 billion) in 2022, according to the China General Administration of Customs.

> "More efforts should also be made to develop next-generation information technologies..., accelerate the smart and green transformation of traditional industries and expand cooperation in the areas of trade..."
>
> **Zhang Yongjun,** deputy chief economist at the Beijing-based China Center for International Economic Exchanges

$9.41 billion
The trade value of China and Uzbekistan in 2022

Bilateral trade amounted to 16.88 billion yuan in the first quarter of 2023, up 7 percent on a yearly basis.

With green development high on the Uzbek government's agenda, Zhengzhou Yutong Bus, a company based in Zhengzhou, Henan province, has been heading in that direction.

It said it will supply 800 new energy buses to Tashkent, capital of Uzbekistan, this year.

Yutong said that the order, which is composed of 300 electric buses and 500 compressed natural gas ones, is the largest of its kind from Uzbekistan for Chinese buses.

Li Haifeng, a senior executive for Yutong's operations in the markets of the Commonwealth of Independent States, said Tashkent purchased 20 of Yutong's new energy buses in early 2022 after a two-year comparison of models from major bus makers around the world.

The fleet, which has been in operation in Tashkent for more than a year, has won the approval of passengers and the city's bus service provider thanks to its safe, green and cost-efficient operation.

Yutong said its global accumulative exports stand at around 86,000 buses, of which 68,000 were sold in countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative.

Eager to expand its presence in markets participating in the BRI, China Energy Engineering, a Beijing-headquartered State-owned enterprise, announced in March that it had begun to build a large-scale wind power project in Uzbekistan.

Located in Bukhara Province, the Bash and Dzhankeldy wind power project is expected to have the largest installed capacity of its kind in Central Asia. It includes the construction of two 500-megawatt wind power plants and associated power export transmission lines.

Taking full advantage of the rich wind resources in the region, the project is to provide more than 3.5 billion kilowatt-hours of power annually, representing a reduction of 1.6 million metric tons of carbon dioxide per year, said Xue Danfeng, deputy board chairman of Energy China's international group.

Xue said that about 500 jobs will be created for local residents during the construction and operation of the project.

Once operational, the project will benefit millions of people in Uzbekistan, strengthen local power supply capacity, improve the local power infrastructure and help transform energy infrastructure in the country, he added.

NBU a key institution in deepening investment cooperation with China

By YUAN SHENGGAO

The National Bank of Uzbekistan has emerged as a crucial institution in Uzbekistan for enhancing investment cooperation with China and is actively taking part in the country's ongoing reforms, the bank said.

Since its establishment in 1991, it has played a significant role in driving the national economy and nurturing a favorable business and investment environment by financing strategically important investment projects for the economy.

NBU's share of the Uzbek banking sector in terms of assets is 21.5 percent, which is equivalent to $10.68 billion. In terms of capital, its share is 20.6 percent, which is equivalent to $1.46 billion. The bank also holds a 23 percent share, equivalent to $7.96 billion, in the country's loans, and a 17.6 percent share, equivalent to $3.4 billion, in deposits.

In an effort to improve people's life quality and develop infrastructure, NBU allocated $1.5 billion in funding toward 59 strategically important investment projects in 2022. These projects encompass various fields, including transport, communications, textiles, services, metallurgy and mining.

As the largest financial development institution in Uzbekistan, NBU plays a significant role in the development and strengthening of investment and trade partnerships with foreign nations, including China.

Uzbekistan and China have maintained diplomatic relations for over 30 years, along with a strategic partnership that's been in place for more than a decade. NBU has made a tangible contribution to these relationships over the years, NBU said.

Furthermore, NBU has established productive and amicable partnerships with major Chinese financial institutions, such as the China Development Bank, the Export-Import Bank of China, China Export and Credit Insurance Corporation, Silk Road Fund, Agricultural Bank of China, and the Shanghai Pudong Development Bank.

The headquarters of the National Bank of Uzbekistan in Tashkent. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

$1.7 billion
The value of 13 credit lines received through SCO cooperation by NBU

To date, NBU has attracted a total of $3.4 billion in credit lines from Chinese financial institutions, with the largest share coming from the China Development Bank. NBU has established a strategic partnership with the China Development Bank at both the bilateral level and as a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Interbank Consortium, founded on the principles of the "Shanghai Spirit".

Through SCO cooperation, NBU has received 13 credit lines worth more than $1.7 billion. Together with the China Development Bank, NBU has financed numerous large investment and infrastructure projects in various sectors such as transport, electrical engineering, telecommunications, agriculture, textiles, construction, services, and more than 700 projects for small and medium-sized enterprises.

Moreover, through productive cooperation with the Export-Import Bank of China, NBU has financed 27 strategic projects amounting to more than $1.4 billion in various sectors such as agriculture and water management, education, medicine, information technology and communications, construction, transport and energy.

In addition, more than 200 SMEs have received financial support from the funds provided by the Export-Import Bank of China to promote trade relations with Chinese manufacturers.

A new model of cooperation has been efficiently and successfully established with the China Development Bank, the Export-Import Bank of China, and the Silk Road Fund in project financing by expanding the share of settlements in Chinese currency renminbi, which has surpassed 2.7 billion yuan ($388.6 million) to date.

NBU cites the successful financing of the Great Silk Road, the largest tourist complex in Samarkand, using renminbi funds provided by the Silk Road Fund, as a practical example of this new cooperation model. This complex was also the site of the 2022 Samarkand SCO Summit. The construction of this "Pearl of the East" has increased the number of tourists by an additional 2 million.

NBU plans to continue its mutually beneficial cooperation with Chinese banks and financial institutions in project and trade financing by attracting new credit lines from the China Development Bank and the Export-Import Bank of China totaling over 3.2 billion yuan.

NBU also aims to expand joint activities in treasury operations by utilizing new financial derivatives and exploring opportunities to enter the foreign exchange market and capital market of China, it said.

ADVERTORIAL

China gets new financial regulator

NAFR will serve real economy, prevent risks and deepen reforms

By **JIANG XUEQING**
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The National Administration of Financial Regulation, China's new financial regulator, was officially unveiled on Thursday.

The formation of the NAFR marks an important step for China, which is seeking to further strengthen and improve its financial supervision through an institutional reform, experts said.

The NAFR will comprehensively strengthen institutional regulation, behavioral supervision, functional regulation, penetrating supervision and continuous regulation.

It will also provide strong support and protection for establishing China's new development pattern and promoting high-quality development, said Li Yunze, Party secretary of the administration.

The NAFR must comprehensively implement the three major tasks of serving the real economy, preventing and controlling financial risks, and deepening financial reforms. It should legally bring all kinds of financial activities under regulation, strive to eliminate regulatory gaps and blind spots, vigorously promote regulatory coordination among central and local governments, and firmly hold the bottom line of no systemic financial risks, Li said at the unveiling ceremony of the NAFR in Beijing on Thursday.

Vice-Premier He Lifeng, who is also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, attended the ceremony and unveiled the nameplate of the administration.

The NAFR, which will function directly under the State Council, China's Cabinet, is formed on the basis of the former China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission. The establishment of the new regulator is expected to strengthen and improve the country's financial regulation, and tackle some of the long-standing and prominent problems in the financial sector, Xinhua News Agency reported.

The new administration is in charge of regulating the financial industry except the securities sector. It will take over certain functions of the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, and the China Securities Regulatory Commission.

Zeng Gang, director of the Shanghai Institution for Finance & Development, said the main goal of the institutional reform for financial supervision is to achieve comprehensive regulation of various financial activities, improve the quality and effectiveness of financial regulation, effectively prevent and resolve financial risks, and firmly guard against systemic risks.

One of the specific reform measures is establishing the NAFR, which can better coordinate the relationship between mixed-ownership operation and segmented regulation, as well as behavioral regulation, entity supervision, functional regulation and prudential regulation, Zeng said.

Wang Jiaqiang, a senior researcher at the BOC Research Institute, said the functions and responsibilities of the NAFR are further expanded and strengthened, including unified supervision of financial industries beyond the securities industry and the overall responsibility of protecting the rights and interests of financial consumers.

"The reform measures will enhance the coverage and penetrability of financial regulation, address long-standing issues such as regulatory gaps, regulatory overlaps and regulatory arbitrage in the financial sector, and promote unified and standardized financial products and services," Wang said.

The reform will help China strengthen financial risk management, prevention and disposal, crack down on violations of laws and regulations, and improve the quality and effectiveness of financial regulation, he said.

"Financial regulation has entered a new stage of strong supervision. The banking industry's operational development faces stronger regulatory constraints but also expects a more stable financial environment," he said.

The National Administration of Financial Regulation is officially unveiled in Beijing on Thursday. BAI JIKAI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Briefly

Tencent reports higher net profit

Tencent's revenue rose 11 percent year-on-year to more than 149.9 billion yuan ($21.4 billion) in the first quarter, according to the Chinese internet giant's financial results. Net profit climbed 27 percent year-on-year to over 32.5 billion yuan in the first three months of 2023.

Fiscal revenue sustains growth

China's fiscal revenue has maintained steady growth momentum in the first four months of 2023, official data showed on Thursday. The country's fiscal revenue expanded 11.9 percent year-on-year to nearly 8.32 trillion yuan ($1.19 trillion) during the period, according to the Ministry of Finance. The increase was partly driven by the country's continued economic recovery.

Jiangsu's foreign trade up 14% in April

Foreign trade in East China's Jiangsu province jumped 14.2 percent year-on-year to about 421.5 billion yuan ($60.4 billion) in April, Nanjing Customs said. While export value touched 280.9 billion yuan, imports reached nearly 140.6 billion yuan. In the first four months, foreign trade totaled 1.62 trillion yuan, data from the Customs in Nanjing, its capital, showed.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

An AI robot introduces exhibitors to visitors at the World Intelligence Congress in Tianjin. JIA CHENGLONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Regional AI hub plan in works to spur socioeconomic development

By **LIU YUKUN, YANG CHENG** in Tianjin and **MA SI** in Beijing

China will intensify efforts to develop artificial intelligence, both in theoretical research and cutting-edge technologies, to build a batch of regional AI industrial hubs for economic and social development, officials said on Thursday.

"China considers AI an important means of enhancing productivity, upgrading industries and improving people's well-being. The country has launched AI development plans and supported the establishment of 18 national new-generation AI innovation and development pilot areas and 32 innovation platforms across the country," said Wang Zhigang, minister of science and technology.

The nation has also actively addressed risks and challenges — such as the ethical governance of AI — that the new technology could bring about, Wang said at the opening ceremony of the World Intelligence Congress in Tianjin.

Wang also called for deeper cooperation among global scientists, entrepreneurs and engineers in AI technological innovation, application, and ethical governance, to promote the sustainable development of AI worldwide.

According to the Ministry of Science and Technology, the rapid development of AI in China has produced significant results. As of 2022, China had the world's largest number of AI patent applications, the highest number of published academic papers and citations. The country is among leaders in the field of computer vision, natural language processing, and speech recognition globally. The size of core sectors in the AI industry exceeded 500 billion yuan ($71 billion), with more than 4,200 representative companies accounting for approximately 16 percent of the world's total.

> "China considers AI an important means of enhancing productivity, upgrading industries and improving people's well-being ..."
>
> **Wang Zhigang,** minister of science and technology

Minister of Education Huai Jinpeng said efforts have been stepped up to actively promote the integration of AI in education by establishing a national smart education public service platform that includes more than 7,100 lessons on job training and about 27,000 lessons on higher education. As of date, the platform had over 25.1 billion views from more than 200 countries and regions.

Chen Min'er, Party secretary of Tianjin Municipality, said more efforts will be made to promote AI use in city governance to facilitate the construction of smart cities.

"We will promote the high-quality development of AI, strengthen the research and development of core technologies such as brain-inspired intelligence and brain-computer interface, promote the deep integration of AI with industries, and facilitate the transformation and upgrade of traditional industries, foster new industries and vigorously develop new energy and intelligent connected vehicles," Chen said.

Tianjin will also use AI to facilitate high-quality reform and opening-up, and utilize new-generation information technologies, such as big data and AI, to promote reforms in finance, taxation and technology sectors to create a first-class business environment that is market-oriented, legalized and internationalized, Chen added.

During the opening ceremony, Zhou Hongyi, the founder of cybersecurity company 360 Security Group, demonstrated how technology can be harnessed to improve city management by launching two new AI products that are able to answer questions relevant to Tianjin's economic and social development and form a picture of future district layout.

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Sinopec, Kazakh firm KazMunayGas to co-develop polyethylene project

By **ZHENG XIN**
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China Petrochemical Corp, or Sinopec, together with KazMunayGas, a state-owned oil and gas company in Kazakhstan, will develop the biggest polyethylene project in Kazakhstan, the Chinese company said on Thursday.

Polyethylene is the most commonly produced plastic. A polymer, polyethylene is primarily used for packaging.

Sinopec signed an agreement with KazMunayGas in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, on Thursday for the joint implementation of the project in the Atyrau region of Kazakhstan, during the state visit to China of Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev.

With a capacity of 1.25 million metric tons per year, the plant will be built on the territory of the special economic zone in Karabatan, close to the Tengiz field of the Atyrau region, Sinopec said.

To confirm Sinopec's future involvement in the project, the two sides will sign a share purchase agreement and other legally binding documents. The final investment decision, called the FID, of the project participants is expected in 2024, it said.

> **1.25m metric tons**
> annual capacity of the polyethylene project in Kazakhstan

Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University, said Chinese companies have various advantages in the petrochemical industry, ranging from technological capabilities to domestic market knowledge.

China has been investing in research and development to enhance its technological capabilities in the petrochemical industry. It boasts a strong presence in both the oil and gas exploration and production sectors, as well as in the refining and production sectors of the petrochemical industry, Lin said.

This has created synergies and cost advantages throughout the value chain. In addition, China's large and rapidly growing domestic market for petrochemical products supported its growth, he said.

Magzum Mirzagaliyev, chairman of KazMunayGas, said the wealth of Sinopec's experience in the design, construction and operation of technologically complex petrochemical facilities will have a positive effect on the planned polyethylene project.

The project will increase the investment attractiveness of the petrochemical industry of Kazakhstan, he said.

Sinopec said it would take advantage of its technology and expertise in the field of petrochemical facility construction, while its participation in the Kazakhstan project will also facilitate the marketing of the project's products in China.

Sinopec said the latest agreement further boosts cooperation between itself and KazMunayGas. The company will further take advantage of its capabilities in engineering, marketing, sales and production operations to further promote complementarity and win-win development of both sides.

Experts rule out further RMB slide

By **SHI JING** in Shanghai
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Although the Chinese currency renminbi faced some downward pressure in the past few trading days, there is little room for it to head further south in light of the economic recovery that is on track, said experts on Thursday.

In offshore trading Wednesday, the yuan dipped 0.3 percent to 7.0201 per dollar at one point, while onshore trading saw the renminbi's exchange rate against the greenback slide 0.4 percent to 7.0026 once, according to Bloomberg data.

It is the first time in five months that both the indicators breached the 7-per-dollar threshold. Onshore RMB touched 7.0145 and offshore RMB 7.0323 Thursday afternoon.

The renminbi's central parity rate quoted by the China Foreign Exchange Trade System was lowered by 219 basis points to 6.9967 on Thursday.

Ming Ming, chief economist of CITIC Securities, said the US banking industry's crisis has intensified the risk aversion sentiment in the market. Meanwhile, the market expectation of interest rate cuts in the United States has cooled due to the unexpectedly prolonged inflation. All these have pushed up the US dollar index recently, exerting pressure on the renminbi.

China's short-term economic fundamentals have not formed strong enough support for the renminbi either, as the April economic data were worse than forecast, he said.

Although China's fixed asset investment increased by 4.7 percent during the first four months of this year, the growth rate was 0.4 percentage point lower than that registered in the first quarter, the National Bureau of Statistics said on Tuesday.

The output made by industrial companies with an annual sales revenue of at least 20 million yuan ($2.9 million) each increased by 5.6 percent in the first four months, lower than the previous market estimation of over 10 percent growth.

But the NBS noted that the overall economic recovery is on track, with most production demand indicators showing year-on-year growth.

In a news conference in March, Yi Gang, governor of the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, said that any renminbi fall below the 7-per-dollar level would no longer be a psychological barrier because China's economy and market expectations are stable.

Wang Qing, chief macroeconomic analyst with Golden Credit Rating, said that the renminbi's exchange rate has fallen below the 7-per-dollar level for three times in the last five years. But every time, it soon rebounded and went above the 7 mark, showing stronger elasticity of the Chinese currency.

Wang said there is little room for the renminbi to depreciate significantly. For one, the US economy is facing further downward pressure, pointing to little likelihood of a continued rising US dollar index.

For another, as China's economic recovery continues, all market interest rates including the renminbi deposit rate will return. The current situation of a lower settlement rate and high selling rate, which has affected the renminbi exchange rate, will not last long. Economic fundamentals will become the major support for the Chinese currency, he said.

In late April, Nomura Asia raised its China 2023 annual GDP growth forecast to 5.9 percent from its previous estimate of 5.3 percent. JPMorgan raised its 2023 growth outlook to 6.4 percent, up from its previous forecast of 6 percent, saying further growth can be expected.

BUSINESS

A freight train serving the International Land-Sea Trade Corridor departs from Chongqing for ASEAN markets in January. LIU CHAN / XINHUA

Sino-ASEAN land-sea trade corridor shows great vitality

Route connecting 393 ports seen as key to national development programs

By **TAN YINGZI** and **DENG RUI** in Chongqing

The new International Land-Sea Trade Corridor, a major international logistics project, has achieved great success as a recent report shows that its development index in 2022 surged to 135.2 from 122.6 in 2021 and 102 in 2020.

As a key project mapped out for the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25), the ILSTC is a trade and logistics passage jointly built by provincial-level regions in western China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations member states.

The land-sea transit route is based on the efficient use of a variety of transportation modes, including railways, highways and waterways.

The index compiled by the ILSTC Coordination Center for Logistics and Operation evaluates the project's domestic infrastructure, service capacity and industrial development and gauges its development level and status in China within a certain period.

The ILSTC development index 2022 was released at the 2023 China-Singapore (Chongqing) Connectivity Initiative International Land-Sea Trade Corridor (CCI-ILSTC) International Cooperation Forum, which kicked off in Chongqing on Thursday.

"The figures prove that the overall implementation of the strategy is good, with the operation effectiveness constantly increasing," said Liu Wei, director of the ILSTC's Coordination Center for Logistics and Operation.

Chongqing, a municipality located on the upper reaches of the Yangtze River, boasts key geographic advantages. It is a strategic pivot point for national development programs in the western regions and a connecting point for the Belt and Road Initiative and the Yangtze River Economic Belt.

It is also the headquarters of the China-Singapore (Chongqing) Demonstration Initiative on Strategic Connectivity, which was launched in November 2015. The CCI launched the International Land-Sea Trade Corridor project in a bid to speed up high-quality development in western China.

Over the past five years, the ILSTC's logistics network has expanded rapidly — it connects Europe with Southeast Asia, with Chongqing as a key rail hub, and now reaches 393 ports in 119 countries and regions, Liu said.

So far, the ILSTC has extended to 13 provincial-level regions including Chongqing and the provinces of Sichuan, Guizhou and Hainan, Zhanjiang of Guangdong province and Huaihua of Hunan province, offering a faster alternative to the coast between inland western regions and ASEAN countries.

Statistics show that since 2017, Chongqing has transported some 450,000 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) of cargo valued at 78.4 billion yuan ($11.2 billion) via the ILSTC, accounting for over 30 percent of the route's total.

According to Chongqing's recent five-year plan (2023-27), to accelerate the construction of the ILSTC, the city will play a bigger role in international logistics and the ILSTC development index will reach 170 by 2027.

At that time, Chongqing's freight volume and value of goods via the ILSTC will double, with the import and export volume with ASEAN countries taking up over 70 percent of the total. Logistics costs and the overall logistics time will be reduced by 20 percent and 30 percent, respectively.

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BMW to make new EVs in Shenyang from 2026

By **WU YONG** in Shenyang and **ZHOU HUIYING**

BMW Group will make its Neue Klasse electric vehicles in Shenyang, Liaoning province from 2026, the German automaker said on Thursday.

"I am pleased to announce the local production of the Neue Klasse vehicles," said Milan Nedeljkovic, BMW AG board member for production, during a news conference at the 20th anniversary of BMW Brilliance Automotive.

"The integration of the Neue Klasse into our production portfolio in China is combined with the development of a high-voltage battery assembly site for our sixth-generation battery. This will make a significant contribution to the further electrification of our portfolio," Nedeljkovic said.

The company said the battery assembly project — with an investment of 10 billion yuan ($1.4 billion) — will cover an area of 240,000 square meters, five times the size of its existing battery assembly facilities. Upon operation, the new plant will provide 2,000 job opportunities.

To prepare for the production of Neue Klasse, an extension to BMW's Shenyang R&D center was officially opened during the anniversary event.

Established in 2013, the center primarily focuses on the development, integration and validation of e-mobility technology, as well as product localization.

The extension, including 19 new test benches — of which 17 are for e-mobility-related tests — will further boost BMW's e-mobility development capabilities in China, the group said.

"As an important city in China's automobile industry, Shenyang is striving to achieve a total output value of 400 billion yuan within three years, among which the output value of energy-saving vehicles and parts exceeds 100 billion yuan, with new energy vehicles accounting for more than 25 percent," said Lyu Zhicheng, mayor of Shenyang, at the news conference.

He said the battery project was not only an important milestone for BMW to accelerate the realization of electrification into a new era, but also the third investment project of 10 billion yuan in the field of new energy in Shenyang. This, he added, will help the city speed up the construction of a "national important automobile industry center".

"Since its founding in 2003, BMW Brilliance Automobile, as one of the first high-end automobile joint ventures in China, has been in harmony with Shenyang and gone through an extraordinary development process together, setting a successful example for industrial cooperation between China and Germany," he said. "We have achieved mutual benefits and win-win results."

Lyu said the company had invested nearly 100 billion yuan and built BMW Group's largest production base, the most advanced vehicle factory, the most important energy-saving vehicle center, and the most cutting-edge research and development center in Shenyang, which has led to the rapid development of a large number of world-class supporting enterprises.

BMW said its Shenyang production base integrates procurement, production, and research and development. It has an annual production capacity of 830,000 units. It is also one of the most important centers for new energy vehicles, it said.

In 2022, BMW Brilliance Automotive's purchasing value in China exceeded 73 billion yuan, of which more than 60 percent was made in Liaoning. It has been the top taxpayer in Shenyang for 17 consecutive years, the company said. Its total tax payment in 2022 was around 48.5 billion yuan, it said.

Reaffirming its confidence and commitment to the Chinese market, BMW said it would accelerate its expansion in Shenyang, and intensify the localization of its electro-mobility across R&D, high-voltage batteries and electric vehicle production.

BMW Group's success in China shows that "foreign enterprises are still optimistic about the investment environment and opportunities in Liaoning," said Li Hongbiao, a senior researcher at the China Academy of Northeast Revitalization. "In recent years, the business environment in Liaoning has been further improving, which makes foreign investors more confident and hopeful."

"Liaoning has the conditions and ability to make new breakthroughs in promoting all-round revitalization by opening up new frontiers, and play a greater role in exploring the great practice of Chinese modernization," he added.

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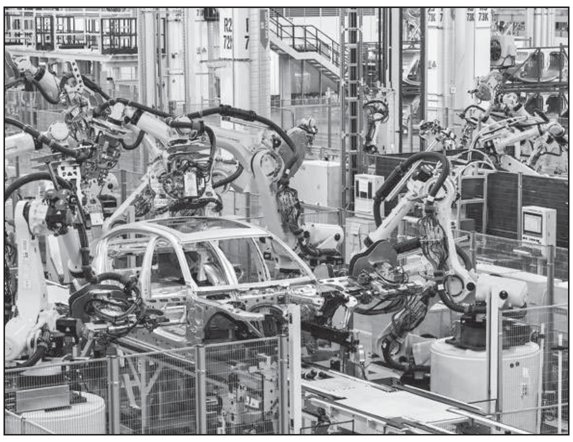

A vehicle is assembled at a BMW smart production line in Shenyang, Liaoning province, in February. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

FedEx, Guangzhou ink pact to expand cooperation

By **LI WENFANG** in Guangzhou
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US-based delivery services provider FedEx Express has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Guangzhou municipal government to work together on Customs clearance and cross-border e-commerce, and establish its operations center in South China, according to a statement by the company on Wednesday.

The two sides, it said, will jointly promote FedEx's business in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, expand e-commerce logistics services and support the city's development as an international cargo hub.

"We have actively intensified collaboration with local governments and partners to more efficiently connect Chinese enterprises with the global market, contributing to the increase of China's exports and imports," said Eddy Chan, senior vice-president of FedEx and president of FedEx China.

"Through the strategic collaboration with the Guangzhou municipal government, FedEx will be able to better meet customer needs, improve Customs clearance efficiency, connect our customers in Guangzhou and southern China more efficiently to global markets, and further promote the development of small and medium-sized enterprises and cross-border e-commerce," Chan said.

Guangzhou's foreign trade rose 1.1 percent year-on-year in 2022 to 1.09 trillion yuan ($156.44 billion), accounting for 13.2 percent of the imports and exports of Guangdong province.

After it became a cross-border e-commerce pilot city in 2013, the size of Guangzhou's cross-border e-commerce reached 137.59 billion yuan last year from 1.46 billion in 2014.

FedEx's Asia-Pacific hub is located at the Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport.

As a major hub in the Asia-Pacific, the facility currently operates more than 210 international flights per week.

Last year, FedEx launched an AI-powered sorting robot at its South China e-commerce shipment sorting center in Guangzhou to handle the growing volumes of e-commerce-related shipments.

As the global economy speeds up its pace of recovery, FedEx will continue to invest in building new facilities and expanding its network to connect its customers in China to the world, according to the statement.

Xiaodu rolls out AI-powered education smartphone, targeting niche market

By **FAN FEIFEI**
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Xiaodu Technology, the smart speaker unit of Chinese tech heavyweight Baidu Inc, has officially released its education-oriented smartphone equipped with an artificial intelligence-powered large language model that is targeted at students, in a bid to carve out a niche in the world's largest smartphone market.

Jing Kun, CEO of Xiaodu Technology, said the new smartphone, called Xiaodu Qinghe, will provide AI-enabled tutoring, English-speaking training and interactive learning guidance for primary and middle school students, as the company aims to extend its footprint in the education hardware segment.

Jing said Baidu's AI large language models will be applied to the company's intelligent terminal devices, such as tablets, smart speakers and headsets in the future. The phone is installed with numerous free learning resources and offers parental controls that can limit the time spent on specific apps. It will go on sale on e-commerce site JD starting next Monday, Xiaodu said.

Xiaodu is the developer of DuerOS, a voice assistant system based on AI that supports television, speakers and other smart home appliances. Xiaodu topped the list in smart speaker shipments last year in China, according to market research firm International Data Corp. The company has expanded its product portfolio to include smart screens, tablets, headsets and televisions.

Xiang Ligang, director-general of the Information Consumption Alliance, a telecom industry association, said Xiaodu has accumulated some advantages in AI-related software technologies and hopes to integrate its smart voice interaction capabilities into a wide range of hardware devices.

The smart gadget market for children is a thriving niche in China as parents hope to apply such devices to help improve their kids' academic performances, Xiang said, while noting it is an inevitable trend that AI large language models will accelerate their applications in various industries.

Data from IDC showed that 65.4 million units of smartphones were shipped in China in the first quarter of the year, down 11.8 percent year-on-year. The market continued its double-digit decline since the first quarter of 2022.

Oppo climbed to the top spot with a 19.6 percent market share, while Apple dropped to second place, accounting for a 17.6 percent share in China's smartphone market, followed by Vivo and Honor, which secured third and fourth places and took up 17.3 and 16 percent of market shares, respectively.

Li Yingtao, an analyst with Beijing-based internet consultancy Analysys, said as an internet company, Baidu falls short in experience in hardware product manufacturing and may encounter challenges in expanding its retail channels and brand development as the competition in China's smartphone market is heating up.

The launch of an AI-powered smartphone aligns with Baidu's strategy to bet big on AI amid a worldwide frenzy surrounding ChatGPT, an AI chatbot launched by US startup OpenAI last November.

In March, Baidu introduced Ernie Bot — its AI-powered large language model and ChatGPT-like product — which boasts capabilities in fields such as literary creation, business writing, mathematics and understanding the Chinese language. Ernie Bot can be used for a range of functions, including searches, autonomous driving and smart devices.

Generative AI will have a profound impact on people's lives and work and a batch of tech companies both at home and abroad have joined the rush to launch ChatGPT-like products and services, said Zhong Zhenshan, vice-president of IDC China.

However, the exploration of generative AI technology is still at a nascent stage, Zhong said, estimating that such technology will be used for intelligent conversation, marketing and searches.

Amber Liu, a research analyst with market consultancy Canalys, said, "Although there will not be a significant recovery of the Chinese smartphone market in 2023, we have observed signals of consumer confidence returning, which will be a good time for vendors to implement their latest branding and product strategies."

BUSINESSFOCUS

Robots, campsites boost tourism upgrades amid China's steady recovery

Increased use of new technologies raises efficiency, leads to rising demand for unconventional travel experiences, experts say

WUHAN — Tourists returning to Chinese scenic spots this year may find many new services on offer — robots performing kung fu, interactive murals and deluxe camps — to name a few. Chinese tourists made 1.22 billion domestic trips in the first quarter of this year, and the country's tourism sector is actively developing new technologies and products to spice up the market.

The China (Wuhan) Culture and Tourism Expo held during April 21-23 attracted 2,000 exhibitors from home and abroad and offered a glimpse into the shift toward high-quality development.

A variety of new technologies — from VR tours and robot guides to intelligent wearables — have been stealing the spotlight at the expo, and are vying for a place in Chinese museums and scenic spots.

For instance, Crinoid, a humanoid robot playing the dulcimer at the expo, has been designed to read music scores, compose music and stage musical performances.

"We are discussing collaborations with several tourist sites, where our robots can be deployed to entertain the tourists," said Zhou Li, head of Crinoid's development team at the China University of Geosciences (Wuhan).

"People are really interested in this new type of performance. What's more, the robot can perform for longer hours at a lower cost," said Zhou.

Industry observers say the increased use of new technologies in the tourism sector has not only raised management efficiency, but also catered to the rising demand for unconventional travel experiences.

"Technologies such as 5G, big data and cloud computing have been widely used in the tourism sector in recent years to develop new travel products and business models," said Fu Caiwu, head of the Institute of National Culture Development at Wuhan University.

"For instance, many tourist sites are now harnessing mobile internet and livestreaming to attract visitors. This has become a new promotion strategy," said Fu.

Other tourist attractions are embracing burgeoning new forms of tourism, such as camping and nighttime travel, to appeal to the wealthier and younger holidaymakers.

Prior to the expo, more than 200 tents were set up along the East Lake of Wuhan, where exhibitors showcased motor homes and camping equipment to the visitors.

On Shuangfeng Mountain in Hubei province, a campsite with over 100 motor homes is crowded with barbecuers seeking a respite from the urban hustle and bustle.

Hu Xiaojun, manager of the campsite, said all the motor homes had been booked up 20 days prior to this year's May Day holiday.

Though new to Chinese holidayers, camping has seen explosive growth in China.

Data from research firm iiMedia Research show that the core market size of China's camping economy reached 113.47 billion yuan ($16.14 billion) in 2022, from 74.75 billion yuan in 2021. The figure is expected to hit a new high this year.

Dai Bin, president of China Tourism Academy, said as China starts becoming a moderately prosperous society, a greater number of Chinese are going for leisure tourism.

"Moreover, the epidemic has boosted demand for local and short-distance travel, which also contributes to the emergence of new leisure tourism, such as camping," said Dai.

New destinations

China saw nearly 1.22 billion domestic tourist trips in the first quarter of 2023, up 46.5 percent year-on-year, according to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Both Spring Festival and Qingming Festival recorded significant yearly rises in the number of tours.

The number of inbound and outbound flights in popular tourist destinations, such as Hangzhou, Chengdu, Sanya and Dali, rose by 20 percent in March from the same period in 2019, according to travel service provider Qunar. In the first quarter of 2023, hotel bookings in popular tourist cities grew by 60 percent from pre-epidemic levels.

"March is usually an off-season for travel, but this year the tourism market has seen better-than-expected recovery," said Guo Lechun, vice-head of the big data research institute at Qunar.

The market rebound is also reflected by the number of newly founded tourism-related companies in the first three months of this year, which, according to Qichacha, a leading platform offering company information inquiry services, reached 79,900.

The ongoing travel frenzy has created unlikely tourist hot spots.

Zibo, an industrial city in Shandong province, has become one of the most popular tourist spots in China after its iconic barbecue — which wraps grilled meat in crispy pancakes — made waves on social media.

The sudden influx of foodies from across China has reportedly overwhelmed local eateries and prompted local authorities to add trains and temporary bus routes.

Tourists have also swarmed into Jiangmen, a coastal city in the southern province of Guangdong, where the popular Chinese TV series *The Knockout* was filmed.

According to the local government, the number of trips into the city between January and February surged by about 68 percent year-on-year.

Overseas destinations have also begun to feel the ripple effect of China's fast-recovering tourism market.

Thailand, for instance, saw 269,745 Chinese tourist arrivals in March, a 70 percent increase from February, according to the Tourism Authority of Thailand. During the first four days of April, the country welcomed no fewer than 8,000 Chinese tourists per day.

At the Wuhan expo, officials and tourist practitioners from 15 countries and regions, including the United States, France, Germany and Serbia, were promoting their products and seeking cooperation with local partners.

"We are focusing on promoting Serbia as a tourist destination, and developing more business relations with Chinese travel agencies during the expo," said Vladimir Koricanac, managing partner with Serbia Tour Operator.

"China's tourism industry is rebounding now, and I believe it will be renewed in full capacity this year as it was before," he said.

XINHUA

Top: Holidaymakers enjoy some leisure time at a campsite in Chongqing during this year's May Day holiday. QU MINGBIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Above: Visitors gather at an art installation about the Yellow Crane Tower, a famous landmark in Wuhan, Hubei province, during an expo in the city in April. HU DONGDONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

LIFE

Brewing up a career

Tea maker uses own hands to test temperatures, producing sublime product, **Yang Feiyue** reports.

Endless rows of tea trees have been competing to sprout new buds since March, and Zhang Ziquan and his staff members have been adeptly picking tender, green tea leaves and placing them into baskets at the foot of a mountain.

The scene is from Zhang's plantation in Pingyang village, Maojian town, Duyun city, Qiannan Bouyei and Miao autonomous prefecture, Guizhou province. There, he practices an ancient art, innovates, follows his dream of being a tea maker, and contributes to the maintenance of China's cultural heritage.

As the tea leaves accumulate and the sun comes down, Zhang starts the frying process. The first step in frying tea is to remove the grassy taste from the tea leaves, he explains.

The emerald green tea leaves crackle as they come into contact with the burning pot. Zhang then stretches his hands into the pot, stirring up the leaves.

"The temperature of the pot needs to reach 250 to 300 C," says the Maojian native, who is in his 50s.

More than four decades of tea making has granted him the capacity to pull off the feat of sensing the high temperature through his bare hands.

"If I feel it is scorching, it is the right temperature," he says.

Zhang's hands have long been accustomed to high temperatures, and he can accurately sense the different temperatures required for frying tea, just like a thermometer.

After the frying, the rolling and kneading start. At this point, the temperature of the pot is maintained at around 80 C.

Zhang quickly rubs the tea leaves in his palms. After the process is complete, the astringency of the tea begins to fade, giving way to a pleasant, ripe flavor.

The third step is to roll the tea leaves into tight strips. Zhang then spends about five minutes pushing the tea leaves in a centrifugal motion around the pot until the leaves turn into a fishhook shape and all moisture is removed.

Next comes the tricky part, in which the pot temperature is rapidly raised to 120 C to continue roasting the tea.

"The first 60 seconds of roasting is the most critical step," he says.

A layer of white fuzz (tea hair) will appear on the green tea leaves. The hair is considered an essential characteristic of the tea and is the main standard for evaluating its quality.

"If you stir-fry them over high heat and don't pay attention, the tea leaves will easily spoil," Zhang says. "It's just like stir-frying vegetables — the rhythm and the temperature of the pot must be coordinated, which requires a lot of experience and skill from the tea maker."

After the cooking is done, the temperature is dropped to 60 C, after which the tea leaves are pressed together in the palm and twisted into balls. While twisting, the leaves are continuously roasted for five minutes, which enhances their aroma.

At the end, Zhang fully dries, and then shrinks the tea leaves.

Zhang amazed everyone present at a recent Duyun Maojian tea demonstration event, as he had all the steps down to a fine art. With the simple tools of an iron pot, a mud stove and firewood, he could finish the whole process of making Duyun Maojian tea, whose production technique was put on UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage list last year.

"Tea leaves picked from the bushes must be processed on the same day, or else the aroma will be affected," he says.

Zhang's family has been making Duyun Maojian tea for four generations.

At the age of 5, he started following his grandfather to pick tea leaves during the day and roast them at night.

"I was not even as tall as the stove, but whenever my grandfather roasted the tea, I would stand on my tiptoes and watch carefully," Zhang recalls.

He then memorized all key operations, such as how to grab, shake, twist, knead and flip tea leaves.

At the age of 12, his grandfather encouraged Zhang to try his hand at the art.

Under his grandfather's instructions, he successfully produced the tea's characteristic white hairs for the first time.

"I was both nervous and excited," he says, adding that this childhood tea roasting experience has made him proud and planted the seeds of desire for him to make a career out of it.

When he was young, tea made by Zhang's family sold at high prices. Such recognition reinforced Zhang's confidence in making the tea.

In the 1980s, many of his fellow villagers went outside to seek jobs with better incomes than what could be obtained in a rural setting, but Zhang stayed, contracting a 1.3-hectare plot of land where he applied his family tea growing skills.

The first year saw him make a profit of more than 1,500 yuan ($216.3), which was a lot of money at the time.

This outstanding performance soon brought attention to him, including from the head of the local tea processing plant.

He was soon recommended to be director at the processing plant, where he worked for the following 16 years.

"My biggest dream during the years at the tea plant was to have my own tea garden," Zhang recalls.

He acted on the dream in 2008 when Duyun came up with policies to develop the tea industry and encourage tea farmers to expand planting.

When Zhang heard the news, he was overjoyed and discussed with his wife his dream of building his own tea garden.

He then leased 25.3-hectare plot of barren land in Pingyang village and started planting tea. In 2009, Zhang joined forces with 38 rural households to establish the Shili Tea Fragrance Cooperative, which contracted more than 45 hectares of tea land.

A tea processing plant was established, and ever since, Zhang and his team have been highly successful in the tea business.

In 2018, the cooperative achieved a production value of more than 4 million yuan.

Local authorities have also vigorously developed tourism based on tea culture, which has brought Zhang's craft more public attention.

Liu Qian, a visitor from downtown Duyun, got a good measure of the tea's charm at a tea festival during the May Day holiday.

"It was my first time experiencing the production of Duyun Maojian tea, and I found it very interesting," Liu says. "At the same time, I also see the difficulty of making it, and I will better appreciate it when I drink it."

According to Zhang, tea roasting looks simple, but to do the right thing at the right time is not easy.

"The key to successfully frying Duyun Maojian tea lies in precise control of the pot temperature," he explains.

Although Zhang has stuck to the traditions of his craft for decades, he has also innovated based on his experience.

For example, in the past, locals could only pick Duyun Maojian tea for a month every year starting from the Qingming Festival around April. The short-term income was far from enough, forcing many villagers to work away from home.

After seeing the problem, Zhang bought books to study fermentation and experimented over subsequent years, developing his signature "Golden Maojian" black tea with its unique aroma, rich taste and long shelf life.

The new tea has enjoyed brisk sales and greatly increased the utilization of local tea resources, bringing more income to local tea enterprises and farmers.

As Zhang's first dream of owning his own tea plantation has been realized, he has set his sights on a new dream — to have more people learn about tea roasting and share his love of it.

Since 2017, he has worked with the Qiannan Polytechnic for Nationalities, inviting students from the institute to come every spring to the tea mountain to do fieldwork, including picking and roasting tea leaves.

Zhang has made a point of demonstrating the key steps for the students. "I am willing to teach as long as they are willing to learn," Zhang says.

He says he hopes that more students can combine textbook knowledge with practical experience, inheriting the ability to make Duyun Maojian tea.

"This way, more people can taste happiness," he says.

Contact the writer at yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn

Top: Zhang Ziquan shows a child how to tell the quality of tea leaves at his tea plantation in Pingyang village, Duyun city, Guizhou province.
Middle: Making tea with hot water is a routine test for Zhang to assess his products.
Above: Zhang stirs tea leaves with his bare hands over a hot pot, which is an essential step to get rid of the grassy taste of tea.
PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Dark-sky drive gives Shenzhen starry nights

Getting away from the hustle and bustle to enjoy the quiet, dark sky and the Milky Way has recently become a trendy method for residents of southern Chinese metropolis Shenzhen, Guangdong province, to spend their holidays.

With the establishment of China's first International Dark Sky Community in Shenzhen last month, more and more Chinese people are taking an interest in dark sky conservation and light pollution control.

In April 2021, local authorities in Shenzhen began efforts to build a dark sky community in Xichong, about 60 kilometers from Shenzhen's downtown. In two years, lighting facilities in the community were upgraded to minimize unnecessary lighting and light pollution, and environmental standards for the dark sky community were formulated.

"It's incredible that there is a place to see the Milky Way in one of the most developed regions of China," says Mei Lin, head of the astronomy department at the Shenzhen Astronomical Observatory.

Mei made the remarks at the recent Forum for Dark and Quiet Sky Protection held at the Xinglong Observatory, run by National Astronomical Observatories China, which is part of the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

The forum was the largest on dark night conservation in China so far, according to Fan Zhou, deputy director of the Xinglong Observatory.

During the forum, participating experts from home and abroad conducted in-depth exchanges on the impact of lighting, radio and artificial satellites on the dark sky and discussed strategies for dark sky conservation in China and around the world.

"We hope to build a platform for communication and cooperation among astronomers, science popularizers and the government to raise the awareness of dark sky conservation among Chinese people," Fan says.

Ruskin Hartley, CEO and executive director of the International Dark-Sky Association, said at the forum that light pollution is growing at an alarming rate globally, with 83 percent of people living under light-polluted skies.

"This loss of darkness not only impacts our view of the stars, but also harms human health, disrupts ecosystems and wastes energy," says Hartley, adding that practical solutions need to be found to reduce light pollution.

Echoing his remarks, Fan says that in the past, people believed that the brighter a city was, the better the economic development it had. But now people are gradually realizing the need to protect the dark sky and have begun to make urban lighting more energy-efficient and environmentally friendly.

Building a beautiful China also requires preserving a starry sky, says Xiao Qing, deputy secretary-general of the China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation.

According to Xiao, the foundation has set up several dark sky reserves in different regions and environments such as plateaus, coastal wetlands, mountains and lakes across China.

Scientists have found that Lenghu in Northwest China's Qinghai province has world-class conditions for astronomical observation.

In January this year, local authorities rolled out regulations for dark sky protection, which defines the area within 50 km of the astronomical observation environment of Lenghu as a core area for dark sky protection.

Furthermore, the regulations have strictly defined the type and brightness of light sources and the direction of illumination of all outdoor night lighting facilities within the core area.

"Through all these efforts, I believe that an environment suitable for astronomical observation will be well protected there," says Yang Fan, a senior engineer at NAOC's Lenghu base.

Experts also noted that with more and more people attracted to the starry night, dark sky protection can also boost economic development. Statistics showed that from April 2021 to this March, six astronomical tourism projects had been established in Xichong, drawing more than 200,000 people and generating a revenue of more than 18 million yuan ($2.6 million).

"Economic and social development does not conflict with dark night conservation," says Ye Jun, secretary-general of the Hangzhou Astronomical Society.

"Don't let stargazing become a fairy tale for our next generation," he adds.

XINHUA

Fashion college shows youth how to design the future

Students at Donghua University have the cutting-edge skills to make their own name, **He Qi** reports.

Armed with the skills and knowledge she picked up at the Shanghai International College of Fashion and Innovation at Donghua University, Vania Limousinea is now ready to return to Indonesia and take her first step into the fashion industry with the launching of her own brand.

Inspired by what she has learned and seen in China, Limousinea will create a formal wear collection that combines modernism with ikat fabric, a type of textile made using traditional Indonesian weaving techniques.

"All the creations will be made in a sustainable manner. What I hope to achieve with this brand is to change the perspectives that the younger generation, particularly those in Indonesia, have about traditional textiles," says Limousinea, who arrived in China in 2019.

According to Limousinea, whose grandparents are Chinese, the courses she has taken at the college in Shanghai were very helpful as they taught her important skills like software design, fashion illustration, photography and painting.

But the most important skill learned during this journey, she notes, was how to go about starting her own business.

"The Chinese market is much bigger and more diverse than Indonesia, and this opened my eyes to the fashion world and how it operates. It's difficult to find a fashion market that is as large as China," she says.

Limousinea is not the only Indonesian student from the school chasing a dream of managing a fashion brand. Sharon Sutanto, who graduated from the college in 2019, currently runs Mulya Zhenda, a company she founded after returning to Indonesia.

Located in Jakarta, Indonesia, and China's Shaoxing in Zhejiang province, the company designs fashion accessories that are produced in China. Sutanto also co-launched a fashion brand named Nuwa, which means a Chinese goddess of creation, after graduating from Donghua University.

Another senior student at the college who is about to graduate is Bilibashi Mariglen, who has already secured a role as an interior designer in Shanghai.

Just as Limousinea is keen to combine the old with the new, the Albanian is looking to integrate Asian architectural and interior styles with European sensibilities in his line of work.

"My ultimate goal is to gain extensive experience in Shanghai as an interior designer. I acknowledge that this may be a challenging endeavor because I'm a foreigner, but I am determined to pursue opportunities that will help me grow in my profession," he says.

Vania Limousinea (above), an international student at Donghua University in Shanghai, displays her fashion collection at the school's graduation exhibition. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Mariglen and Limousinea were among the 35 senior students from the fashion college who displayed their creations at the school's graduation exhibition at the Consinee Shanghai Center from April 26 to May 10.

Li Jun, the dean of the college, says that this year's graduation showcase was a reflection of how young designers today are bold to share their thoughts and perspectives with the world.

"Generation Z (those born between the mid-1990s and the early 2000s) have strong personalities. They like to focus on themselves and the communities they like," Li says.

"They will work hard to study the things they prefer and convert their hobbies into their work. They also want to use the latest technologies and materials to do exploration and research," he adds.

Li says that the trend of using new materials and artificial intelligence, the sustainable development of national culture and the environment, as well as the progress of a community with a shared future for mankind are all hot topics that these young people are currently paying attention to. Their interest in these topics have also been reflected in their graduation works.

"This group of graduates like to be introspective about the value of their works, as well as the value and significance of their future," he says.

According to Li, the college currently has 26 international students that account for about 12 percent of the overall student population. About 19 of them are from the countries that are involved in the Belt and Road Initiative.

"Many students come from the countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative and other countries because of one key feature of Donghua University — we gather experts from the entire textile industry chain, something that is rare in the world," he says.

"The students will not only learn knowledge from books but also get access to resources such as textile and clothing, as well as fashion-related enterprises in the Yangtze River Delta region."

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Online
Watch the video by scanning the code.

Key net meeting told of revenue bonanza

By **ZHANG KUN** in Shanghai

Internet audio and video content in China generated a market of more than 800 billion yuan ($115.03 billion) last year, according to data released at the first Shanghai Internet Audio and Video Content Creators Conference last week.

Held from May 11 to 13, the conference was attended by celebrated streaming platform uploaders from all over China.

Themed "Creation Achieves Dreams", the conference was jointly held by the Shanghai Administration of Culture and Tourism, the Shanghai Administration of Radio and Television and Hongkou district's government, aiming to nurture more popular homegrown cultural content and IP franchises.

According to last year's White Paper on the Internet Audio and Video Content Creators released at the conference, the number of internet audio and video content creators in China experienced explosive growth in the past few years and has now gradually settled.

Meanwhile, the number of users of internet audio and video in the country reached 1.04 billion as of December.

Leading platforms, such as Bilibili, Douyin and Xiaohongshu, had a total number of 9 million content creators in 2021 and so far, their total number has exceeded 13 million, still with potential for further growth.

The white paper says nearly 60 percent of the country's internet audio and video content creators are between 25 and 34. About 46 percent of such creators are doing it as a part-time job, and 37 percent make a living with it.

"To record and share life"; "It's a personal hobby"; "for the extra income" and "to share my ideas and knowledge" were among the most popular motivations for these creators.

The white paper also notes that internet content providers are becoming younger and more diversified and professional. They have achieved fame online, but, at the same time, they are faced with problems, such as the exhaustion of creative ideas, anxiety for the flow of page views, as well as homogenization of content.

The conference organizers released a proposal of directions for these creators, encouraging them to promote Chinese culture, present the beauty in everyday life, facilitate cultural communications, spread messages of solidarity and continue generating more outstanding contents.

Theater to present three plays in Hebrew

By **ZHANG KUN** in Shanghai
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The Shanghai Culture Square theater will present three plays in Hebrew during its first Israel Theatre Showcase, which will take place from July to November.

In recent years, a series of outstanding Israeli plays, such as *Requiem*, *Village* and *Ghetto*, have toured China and showcased colorful styles, diverse subjects and high artistic standards, winning plaudits from theater lovers in China, according to Fei Yuanhong, deputy general manager of Shanghai Culture Square.

In line with its mission to introduce high-quality theater works to Shanghai, the theater decided to stage a series of Israeli productions this year to facilitate cultural exchanges between China and abroad, broaden the audience's vision and enrich the theater programming, according to Fei. He also hopes the event will help audiences better appreciate international shows.

Based on the novel *Oblomov* by Russian author Ivan Goncharov, *The Superfluous Man* by the Israeli Mitcha Figa theater will be staged on July 8 and 9.

According to the director of the play Yehezkel Lazarov, he wanted to use the story of a character that is frequently featured in Russian literature in the late 1800s to address the notion of the "nothingness of being"; what it means to be nothing; and if we are allowed to live life without leaving anything behind.

Second on the list is *The Dybbuk* by Gesher Theatre, which will be performed on Oct 27 and 28.

Created in 1914 by famous Jewish writer, polemicist and political and cultural activist Shloyme Zanvl Rappoport (also known as S. Ansky), the play is often known as "the brightest pearl in the history of Jewish theater".

In Jewish folklore, the dybbuk is a disembodied human spirit that wanders restlessly until it finds shelter in a living person. In the play, a bride is possessed by a dybbuk on her wedding day. As it turns out, the dybbuk is a young man in love with her and had died upon knowing about her being married to another man.

If you go

The Superfluous Man
7:30 pm, July 8-9
The Dybbuk
7:30 pm, Oct 27-28
Hamlet
7:30 pm, Nov 10-11
Shanghai Culture Square, 597 Fuxing Road Middle, Huangpu district, Shanghai.
021-5461-9961.

The third play is *Hamlet*, which is scheduled for Nov 10 and 11. The play will be presented by the Beit Lessin Theater with new interpretation by award-winning director Yair Sherman.

Sherman was the director of *Requiem*, a play that toured China in 2019.

The version of *Requiem* written and directed by Hanoch Levin is arguably the Israeli play that Chinese audiences are most familiar with. The play toured China in 2004, 2006, 2012 and 2019.

Sherman also directed the 2019 Chinese edition of *Requiem*, which starred renowned film actors Ni Dahong and Sun Li.

Another play by Levin, *The Child Dreams*, was presented at Shanghai Culture Square in 2019, which marked the first time an Israeli production was shown at the theater.

The Shanghai Culture Square theater will present three plays in Hebrew, including *Hamlet* (above left) and *The Dybbuk* (above), during its first Israel Theatre Showcase, which will take place from July to November. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

LIFE

Guiding principles

Despite finding fame online, dedicated Beijing-based tourism service provider remains true to his mission of delivering the best possible experience to all clients, **Yang Feiyue** reports.

Cao Zhen didn't take a break after the hectic May Day holiday.

The Beijing-based tour guide was up in the wee hours the following day and heading for the Palace Museum to prepare for his usual livestream broadcast from the tourist hot spot.

"My home is a bit far away from the museum, so I have to start out at 4 o'clock in the morning," says the 38-year-old.

From the origin of the Jinshui River's name and its functions, to the landscape of the Palace Museum, China's former imperial palace, also known as the Forbidden City, and details of its every gate, Cao paints a vivid picture telling the stories behind them.

"I can reach a wider audience this way, compared with in-person tours," says Cao, who has been a guide for about 15 years and received the National May 1 Labor Medal for his work in 2021.

"The livestream tours can also be more comprehensive and detailed, and the process of doing them is very beneficial for me to improve and enhance my own knowledge," Cao says.

"During the livestream, I will advertise my in-person tours and welcome people to come to the Forbidden City and experience this ancient and profound culture for themselves," he says.

Most days, Cao conducts a four-hour livestream tour in the morning, before spending the entire afternoon entertaining clients at the Palace Museum in person.

He offers tourists of different age groups different explanations.

"For middle-aged tourists, I place a focus on the weight of history; for primary school students, I add some interesting historical stories," Cao explains.

For example, when it comes to explaining the Zhengda Guangming ("fairness and enlightenment") plaque in Qianqing Gong (Hall of Heavenly Purity), he will not stop at just explaining its function as a place where a sitting emperor would hide the name of his successor.

"The obvious reason was to avoid brothers fighting and killing each other for the throne," Cao says. He will then go into the details of how Zhu Zhanji of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) ascended to the throne.

"The additional content is rarely included in ordinary tours because of time constraints," Cao says.

"Generally, when it comes to the role of the Zhengda Guangming plaque, the explanation ends, without mentioning the drawbacks of the system. However, from the feedback I've received from tourists, they want further explanation," he adds.

Older tourists are interested in the role of the plaque, while children, he says, prefer to hear the stories about power struggles for the throne.

After graduating from the North China Institute of Science and Technology in 2008, Cao entered the tourism industry.

He started by entertaining tour groups to Beijing.

As a local, he felt it was the best of both worlds to make a living by promoting the charm of his hometown.

Through learning and preparing for the role, the job has enabled him to better understand the capital city, its culture and history.

"The Palace Museum is a place that most tourists will visit when they come to Beijing. It embodies the city's diverse culture in terms of history, architecture and aesthetics, and there are many interesting things to talk about," Cao says.

To ensure his guests get the best of what the city has to offer in their limited time, Cao has visited practically all the tourist attractions in Beijing, while attending training and communicating with scholars engaged in research of Beijing's history and culture.

He has incorporated what he has learned into his tours and shares the profound historical and cultural heritage of Beijing with his clients.

In 2017, Cao was chosen by the Beijing tourist guide association to be among a group of guides who would give in-depth tour explanations to enhance the cultural experiences of tourists to the city.

As his work experience grew, Cao also took outbound trips, including those to Germany, France and Italy.

"Compared with domestic trips, the biggest obstacle was the language," Cao says.

To improve his English proficiency, he memorized related English textbooks for tour guides and sought help from friends with strong foreign language abilities to practice speaking.

"To be more familiar with the destination countries, I also enrolled in study tours organized by travel agencies specifically for tour guides," he says.

"Trying to satisfy every tourist is something that I have always insisted on doing," he says.

The enthusiasm for his job has seen Cao develop special services for some of his clients, such as the elderly.

When Cao learned that one client with cognitive issues had just had an operation, he took the initiative to rent a wheelchair, and carried the guest on his back up any stairs they encountered during the trip.

In particular, he also plans something special for children attending his tours.

"If there are children in the group, I will prepare a notebook for each of them and ask them to record memorable things during the trip, whether it's writing or drawing," Cao says.

"At the end of each day's itinerary, I will invite them to share their experiences with the group to increase their sense of participation."

Such efforts have ensured that he has zero complaints to his name and, over the course of his career, they have helped him win many honors, such as "model guide" from the China Association of Travel Services, and "gold tour guide" at the 2019

Clockwise from top right: Cao Zhen presents a livestreamed tour at the Palace Museum; Cao gives a tour in Switzerland; his daily routine includes giving a tour of the Palace Museum via livestreaming; and Cao explains the history of the capital city's Central Axis to some tourists at a museum in Beijing.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

> "Riding on the rapid wave of development in social media, the culture and tourism industry has also undergone many changes, and we should embrace it."
>
> **Cao Zhen,** award-winning tour guide

national guide competition.

Cao has also shared his experiences with his colleagues, hosting lectures and training sessions.

In July 2020, when tourism was halted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, he dipped his toe into the waters of the online services market.

Cao started his first livestream on Douyin at the Palace Museum, a landmark that holds special cultural significance to him.

"I thought no one would watch, but more than 40 people followed me," he recalls. "I was more than satisfied."

From then on, he has continued to present two online sessions a day at the museum.

As he eased himself into the new role, his presentation skills and interactions with his audience became increasingly better.

In two months, the numbers of his followers had surged to 500,000.

It didn't take long before some internet influencer companies approached him with business propositions offering him internet hosting jobs.

However, Cao turned them down.

"I always consider my primary role to be that of a tour guide," Cao says, adding that all the honors he has received are a result of his job.

"I know my place and I wouldn't compare myself to an influencer. The livestreams and the tours are a happy medium," he adds.

In Cao's opinion, an increasing number of Chinese tourists are no longer satisfied with the old-fashioned routine, where they get on a bus and just go sightseeing and take photos.

"They want to know the historical and cultural context behind the attractions, and learn the stories behind the cultural relics," Cao says.

He says that, thanks to the relaxed pandemic prevention measures, he has witnessed firsthand the desire for travel that has been pent-up over the past three years. Online tours played a positive role in satisfying the public's need for cultural interpretation, as has been proven by the great enthusiasm of Cao's more than 920,000 followers.

In his livestream on the Douyin platform, the number of his online viewers exceeds 40,000.

Many of his online fans have come all the way to seek his services for an in-person tour through the historical site.

Ping Anpeng is one of Cao's followers and recently booked his guide service at the museum.

"I've been to the Palace Museum many times, but Cao's explanations reveal so much more than I noticed before," Ping says.

"I took my child this time and we both had a fun and rewarding trip," Ping adds.

Despite the return to normal, pre-COVID services, Cao says he will continue producing his online tours.

"The development and prosperity of the livestreaming and short video industry has brought more convenient channels for the general public to obtain information," Cao says.

"Riding on the rapid wave of development in social media, the culture and tourism industry has also undergone many changes, and we should embrace it," he adds.

Contact the writer at yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn

Visitors journey through space and time on unique tour

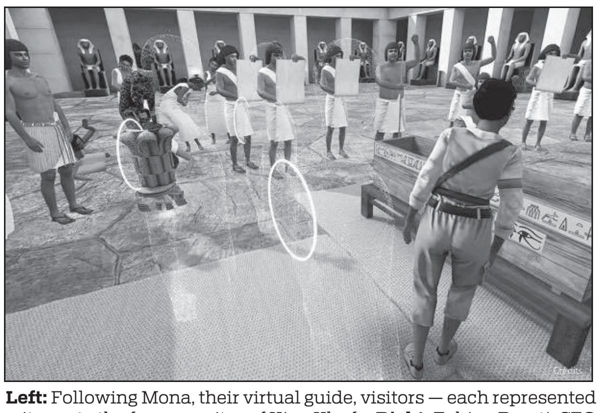
By ZHANG KUN in Shanghai

A new exhibition in Shanghai takes visitors on a journey to ancient Egypt, where they can explore inside the Great Pyramid, visit spaces previously closed to the public and attend the funeral of the Pharaoh Khufu.

The Horizon of Khufu: A Journey in Ancient Egypt opened on Saturday at HKRI Taikoo Hui in downtown Shanghai and will run for four months. Jointly presented by LWA Brand Management and HKRI Taikoo Hui, the exhibition is an immersive expedition created by French company Excurio, an award-winning developer of virtual and augmented reality solutions.

The exhibition in Shanghai marks the first overseas stop for the international tour of the project, following domestic runs in Paris and Lyon last year.

The Horizon of Khufu has been conceived in partnership with Peter Der Manuelian, professor of Egyptology at Harvard University and director of the Giza Project. He and his team supervised the making of this experience, ensuring its scientific accuracy through the application of architectural and historical data in the reproduction of the site and reenactment of ancient practices.



Left: Following Mona, their virtual guide, visitors — each represented by an avatar — travel back 3,000 years to ancient Egypt to bear witness to the funerary rites of King Khufu. **Right:** Fabien Barati, CEO and cofounder of Excurio, a French company that developed the immersive expedition format and produced *The Horizon of Khufu*, speaks at the launch of the show in Shanghai on May 12.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

According to Fabien Barati, CEO and cofounder of Excurio, "Our ambition is to create a new standard with this immersive experience.

"We would like to develop this type of immersive experience for cultural heritage sites in China as well," Barati says.

Virtual experiences can't replace real visits, but very often the historical sites are not fully accessible for a number of reasons, such as preservation, renovation, safety or simply being too difficult to reach. Such immersive shows will be a complementary experience, and a new way to discover and understand cultural heritage, he says.

Supplied with a connected backpack and headset supported by cutting-edge technology provided by HTC Vive, within seconds, participants are transported to the foot of the biggest pyramid in Egypt as the sun sets. They are greeted by Mona, who is their virtual guide throughout the 45-minute tour.

Stepping into the pyramid, visitors wander through galleries and spaces, many of which are off-limits to the public at the original site, before reaching its peak, where a breathtaking view of modern Cairo and the Giza Plateau unfolds before their eyes. As they climb to the summit of the pyramid, they grasp the intricacies of its use in ancient times, while learning about the latest archaeological discoveries at the site. Finally, the virtual traveler embarks on a journey down the Nile after climbing aboard the Pharaoh's solar barque — a ship designed to carry the resurrected king across the skies — bearing witness to the funerary rites of King Khufu more than 3,000 years ago.

It is the first tourist experience in the world that was created through surveying, scanning and modeling the Great Pyramid and its surroundings, according to Barati.

The experience also provides the illusion of traveling freely, thanks to virtual reality equipment enabling visitors to traverse a space of 500 square meters into the heart of one of the most significant archaeological sites of human civilization.

SPORTS

BASKETBALL

Butler fuels Heat as Boston burned

Another Jimmy masterclass earns Miami Game 1 win

Jimmy Butler of the Miami Heat shoots over Malcolm Brogdon of the Boston Celtics during Game 1 of the NBA Eastern Conference Finals on Wednesday in Boston, Massachusetts. Butler scored 35 points as the Heat rallied in the second half to beat the Celtics 123-116. GETTY IMAGES VIA AFP

BOSTON — The Miami Heat were in need of a calming presence following a sluggish start to their latest conference finals showdown with the Boston Celtics.

Jimmy Butler provided that and a lot more.

Butler scored 35 points, including 20 after halftime, and the Heat rallied in the second half to beat the Celtics 123-116 in Game 1 of the Eastern Conference finals on Wednesday night.

He said his teammates have given him confidence.

"I'm playing at an incredible level because they are allowing me to do so," Butler said. "They are not putting a limit on my game. They are trusting me with the ball, on the defensive end. I think that's what any basketball player wants."

Miami trailed by nine at halftime before turning it around with a franchise playoff-record 46 points in the third and outscoring Boston 66-50 over the final two quarters. It was Butler's fifth game with 30 or more points this postseason and he added seven assists, six steals and five rebounds.

"One of the premier two-way basketball players of this association. ... That's what we needed," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said. "Down the stretch Jimmy was able to do everything we needed — as a scorer and as a facilitator."

Bam Adebayo added 20 points and eight rebounds. Kyle Lowry, Caleb Martin, Gabe Vincent and Max Strus all added 15 points apiece. The Heat went 16 of 31 from the 3-point line.

The No 8-seeded Heat have opened all three playoff series with road victories. Game 2 is Friday in Boston.

Jayson Tatum led the Celtics with 30 points, but didn't take a shot in the fourth quarter. Jaylen Brown finished with 22 points and nine rebounds. Malcolm Brogdon added 19 points.

Boston is just 4-4 at home during this postseason.

"I don't know why," Tatum said of their home struggles. "You've still got to play the game, you've got to make plays, regardless of whether you're home or away."

The Celtics, who are at their best when they're defending and getting up more shots than their opponents, were 10 of 29 from beyond the arc.

"We lost our offensive purpose," Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla said.

The tip-off of the series marked the third time in four seasons that the Heat and Celtics have met in this round. Boston won last year's matchup in seven games.

Wednesday's opener felt every bit like a continuation of that most recent meeting. Boston dominated inside early on and led by nine at halftime.

Spoelstra said his team was "more intentional" over the final 24 minutes.

Miami took a page out of the Celtics' book and used a 13-1 run to quickly erase that gap, tying the game at 78 in the third quarter. During the next timeout, Mazzulla was captured by TV cameras throwing a clipboard in frustration.

Boston couldn't stop the onslaught and Miami then nudged back in front as Butler penetrated to create opportunities for his teammates.

The Heat outscored the Celtics 46-25 in the period and took a 103-91 lead into the fourth, prompting a few boos from the TD Garden crowd.

Boston responded, scoring the first seven points of the final period before a 3-pointer by Vincent ended the run.

Miami led 114-109 with just over three minutes to play when Brogdon was fouled by Butler. But he connected on just 1 of the 2 free throws. Butler was trapped on the next Miami possession before finding Martin for a corner 3.

Tatum traveled, giving the ball back to the Heat. A Miami miss gave the ball back to Boston, but Tatum was called again for traveling.

Miami wound the shot clock down before getting a 3-pointer by Butler to rattle in with 1:03 remaining.

But everything changed in the second half.

"We are just playing really good basketball," Butler said. "More than anything, we are staying together through the good and through the bad."

Road warriors

The Heat are the fifth team to open with road wins in each of their first three series, joining the 2021 Hawks, 1999 Knicks, 1989 Bulls and 1981 Rockets. The Knicks were the only other No 8 seed to make the conference finals.

Tip-ins

Heat: Miami's previous high in the playoffs was 43 points in a half against Charlotte in 2016. ... Lowry hit five of his first six shots, scoring 13 points in his first nine minutes of action. ... Butler (12) and Adebayo (6) combined for 18 of Miami's 28 points in the first quarter. It marked the seventh time Butler has reached double figures in the first period this postseason.

Celtics: Marcus Smart finished with 13 points and 11 assists. ... Led 66-57 at halftime. With the score tied at 47, Boston outscored Miami 19-10 over the final 5:26 of the half. ... Brown wore his black protective mask after going without it for the final two games of their semifinals matchup with the 76ers. He fractured a facial bone late in the regular season. ... New England Patriots coach Bill Belichick was in attendance.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

TENNIS

Rising Rune outruns rusty Djokovic

ROME — Novak Djokovic sees a bit of himself in Holger Rune.

The 20-year-old Rune is solid in nearly every area: A great mover and super fit, he's strong off both his forehand and backhand, has good hands and is an aggressive returner.

Perhaps that's why Rune has now recorded two victories over Djokovic in little more than six months, beating the 22-time Grand Slam champion 6-2, 4-6, 6-2 Wednesday to reach the Italian Open semifinals.

Rune, who also defeated Djokovic in the Paris Masters final in November, troubled the Serbian star with his rapid court coverage. He made his opponent hit extra balls on points that Djokovic thought he had already finished off.

Djokovic said the consistently damp conditions at Foro Italico this week were challenging for him.

"In these kinds of conditions, it's very difficult to get the ball past him," Djokovic said. "He's very, very fast, very quick. Great anticipation. Just a very talented, dynamic player, all-around player.

"He was just better. He played too good for me for the most part of the match," Djokovic added. "He kept his nerves and deserved to win."

Unlike the win in Paris, which was a breakthrough moment for Rune, this one felt like a confirmation for the Danish player.

"If it's working against Novak, it works against almost anybody," Rune said of his performance.

The 35-year-old Djokovic didn't appear at his best physically early on and called for a trainer after holding for a 2-1 lead in the second set. It wasn't immediately clear what the issue was.

Djokovic recently returned after three weeks off because of a lingering issue with his surgically repaired right elbow. He's preparing for the French Open, which starts in 11 days.

"I know I can always play better," Djokovic said. "I always like my chances in Grand Slams against anybody on any surface, best of five."

Rune, meanwhile, is boosting his credentials as a Grand Slam title contender after a solid season on clay that included a runner-up finish in the Monte Carlo Masters, a title in Munich, and now a semifinal spot in his first main-draw appearance in Rome.

"I want to win a Grand Slam this year," Rune said. "I hope it can be achieved at the French Open. If not, I hope to make it in the other two Grand Slams."

Djokovic stormed into a 5-2 lead in the second but Rune battled back, winning a 34-shot rally with a sublime backhand drop shot to set up a late break.

Rune also called for a trainer late in the second set to have his right leg treated. The match was then suspended because of rain with Rune serving to stay in the set at 4-5, 0-30.

After a suspension of more than an hour, Djokovic won two straight points to break Rune's serve and take the second set. But Rune responded with two service breaks early in the third.

Djokovic committed 35 unforced errors to Rune's 15, with 22 of those coming on his forehand.

Djokovic has won the Italian Open six times, including last year, and failed to reach the final only once in eight previous editions — when he was beaten by Rafael Nadal in the 2018 semifinals.

Nadal, who holds the record of 10 titles in Rome, is not playing as he remains hampered by a nagging hip injury, leaving his status for Roland Garros in question.

With Djokovic eliminated, an 18-year streak of either him or Nadal playing in the Rome final ends.

Djokovic will also lose the No 1 ranking to Carlos Alcaraz, another 20-year-old player, next week — even though Alcaraz was beaten by 135th-ranked Hungarian qualifier Fabian Marozsan in the third round on Monday.

Rune's semifinal opponent will be Casper Ruud, who beat Francisco Cerundolo 7-6 (5), 6-4.

'Not a bad boy'

Rune got into a heated exchange with the chair umpire during the second set. When the umpire refused to change the call, the Dane lost his cool.

"Do you get punished when you make mistakes? You don't. So please respect the player," Rune said to the umpire, Mohamed Lahyani. "It's an absolute joke."

Rune took issue when he was asked about his reputation as the game's "bad boy".

"I don't see myself as the bad boy at all," he said. "I play with a lot of passion and energy when I'm on the court. ... I don't know why that should be a bad-boy thing, to play with energy on the court. A bad-boy thing is to break rackets and stuff like this. If I remember well, I don't break a racket when I play."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Denmark's Holger Rune returns to Serbia's Novak Djokovic during their Italian Open quarterfinal at Foro Italico in Rome on Wednesday. Rune won 6-2, 4-6, 6-2. AFP

Kyrgios withdrawal 'due to cut'

Nick Kyrgios' French Open withdrawal was because of a cut foot sustained when a man allegedly stole his car at gunpoint, his agent says, rather than knee surgery.

The French Tennis Federation said earlier this week the Australian would miss Roland Garros due to surgery in January to repair a torn left meniscus.

But his agent told The Canberra Times the knee was "fine" and a nasty cut to the foot was why he would not be in Paris.

"The knee surgery went as well as it possibly could and his rehabilitation was fantastic and we were at the point where we were doing on-court loading and management," Daniel Horsfall told the newspaper.

"We needed to be at a point that he could comfortably play five sets. Right when we were getting stuck into the loading period, the (alleged) armed robbery happened at his house.

"During the ordeal he cut his foot quite badly. It's not healing correctly and he can't put in the work on court, so he's been off court for almost two weeks now."

Court documents cited by national broadcaster ABC alleged that a man pointed a gun at Kyrgios' mother before stealing his Tesla car near his home in Canberra.

The 28-year-old Kyrgios, who was nearby, called police and using an app on his phone helped them track his car's location. It is not clear how he cut his foot.

The 2022 Wimbledon finalist, ranked 26th in the world, has not played the French Open since a second-round exit in 2017. This year's tournament starts on Sunday.

AFP

BASEBALL

More sticky business in MLB as Yankees pitcher suspended

NEW YORK — New York Yankees pitcher Domingo German was suspended for 10 games Wednesday by Major League Baseball and fined for violating the sport's prohibition of foreign substances on the mound.

The penalty was announced following German's ejection in the fourth inning on Tuesday night at Toronto for what an umpire said was "the stickiest hand I've ever felt".

"My fingers had a hard time coming off his palm," crew chief James Hoye explained after the game.

The punishment was imposed by Michael Hill, MLB's senior vice-president for on-field operations. German did not appeal, and his suspension began with Wednesday night's game in Toronto.

The 30-year-old German cannot be replaced on the roster while he is suspended. Barring rain-outs, he will be eligible to return May 28 against San Diego.

"He went over the line that umpires deemed and now we've got to live with the consequences of that," Yankees manager Aaron Boone said on Wednesday in Toronto. "No one player needs to carry this load. We'll share it all and we'll do it together."

Yankees right-hander Luis Severino is expected to be activated off the injured list on Sunday to start in German's place against the Cincinnati Reds.

A two-time All-Star, the 29-year-old Severino has not pitched for New York this season because of a right lat strain. He allowed two runs and six hits over 3 1/3 innings on Tuesday in a rehab start with Double-A Somerset.

German, who is Dominican, had retired his first nine batters on Tuesday night. He denied Hoye's assertion, saying he didn't have anything on his hand other than rosin.

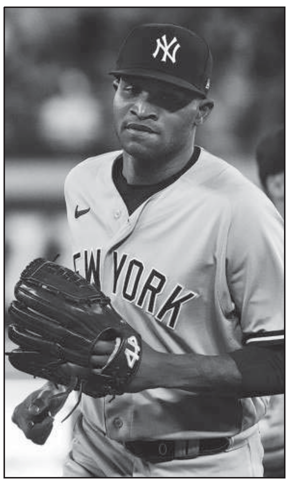
"It was definitely just the rosin bag," German said through a translator. "It was sweat and the rosin bag. I don't need any extra help to grab the baseball."

German's ejection was the fourth since Major League Baseball started its crackdown on prohibited grip aids two years ago, and the second this season.

Hoye's crew examined the 30-year-old right-hander during an April 15 start against Minnesota, when German retired his first 16 batters, but allowed him to stay in that game. Hoye had asked German to wash rosin off his hand and some had remained on the pitcher's pinkie.

Mets pitcher Max Scherzer was suspended for sticky stuff on April 20, and Seattle's Hector Santiago and Arizona's Caleb Smith were suspended in 2021.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



New York Yankees starting pitcher Domingo German has been issued a 10-game suspension and an undisclosed fine for violating MLB's policies regarding the use of foreign substances. AP

SPORTS

SOCCER

City on the scent of history

Guardiola's men maul Madrid to move within three games of Champions League, Premier League and FA Cup treble

Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola directs his team from the sideline during Wednesday's Champions League semifinal, second leg against Real Madrid. City advanced 5-1 on aggregate. REUTERS

Manchester City is three games away from making history. And after the stunning rout of Real Madrid in the Champions League semifinals on Wednesday, Pep Guardiola's march toward a treble of trophies feels unstoppable.

"We are there. We can think about it, can visualize it," the City manager said after his team's 4-0 win at the Etihad Stadium.

After drawing the first leg 1-1, defending champion Madrid was utterly humbled. Had goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois not produced a string of superb saves, the scoreline would have been so much worse for the 14-time European Cup winner.

City feels like an irresistible force as it closes on the Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup titles. It was certainly too hot for Madrid to handle as Bernardo Silva scored twice in the first half, Eder Militao netted an own-goal after the break and substitute Julian Alvarez struck in added time to seal a 5-1 aggregate triumph.

Madrid has fought its way back from the brink on numerous occasions over the past two seasons, but this was too great a challenge.

After overrunning the Spanish giant, City will be heavily favored to do the same to Inter Milan in the final in Istanbul on June 10.

A win against Chelsea on Sunday would secure a third straight league title and Manchester United stands in its way in the FA Cup final. United is the only English team to win the three main trophies in one season — doing so in 1999.

City has already overtaken its Manchester rival as the dominant force in English soccer and can now emulate its greatest achievement.

"We are close and of course we are going to try," Guardiola said.

City is going in search of its first Champions League title, while Guardiola is aiming to win it for a third time as a coach.

At times, it has seemed as though the pressure on Europe's biggest stage was too big for a team that has been a serial winner in domestic competition. While City's quality has rarely been in question over Guardiola's seven years in charge, its temperament in the Champions League has been.

On too many occasions it has fallen short when the heat was on — losing to underdogs such as Monaco, Lyon and Tottenham.

It was in command for almost the entirety of the two legs against Madrid last year, but still managed to lose after blowing a two-goal lead in the last few minutes at the Santiago Bernabeu.

That never looked likely on this occasion, however, as City provided further evidence that it is finally ready to lift the one trophy that has eluded it.

"After 10 or 15 minutes I had the feeling that all the pain we had in one season, one year, what happened last season, was there today," Guardiola said. "It was really tough to lose the way we did and I think we had to swallow poison. Football always gives you another chance."

Having been dominated for long periods by Madrid in the first leg last week, City took control from the start in front of its own fans.

Erling Haaland twice saw headers brilliantly saved by Courtois early on. With the crowd roaring on every City move, it seemed only a matter of time before the home team would find a breakthrough — and it came in the 23rd minute.

After denying Haaland twice, Courtois could not keep out Silva, who raced onto a Kevin De Bruyne pass before firing in at the near post.

The sense of relief in the stadium was palpable, with Guardiola double fist-pumping and blowing kisses toward the supporters.

Having been passive for the opening 30 minutes, Madrid sprung into life and Toni Kroos hit the bar from around 25 meters.

It was a warning to City and moments later the home team was celebrating a second goal, with Silva the scorer again in the 37th.

Ilkay Gundogan burst into the box and when his shot was blocked, Silva was the quickest to react, heading the rebound beyond Militao on the line.

Haaland could have killed the game when he found himself one-on-one with Courtois in the 73rd, but the Norwegian saw his shot diverted onto the bar.

City did not have to wait long for a third, with Militao diverting De Bruyne's freekick into his own net.

The crowd was already in celebratory mood and was given one more goal to cheer when Alvarez burst through and slid a shot past Courtois in stoppage time.

Guardiola won the Champions League twice with Barcelona, but has failed to add to that total with Bayern Munich and City.

This is only his second final since last winning the competition in 2011, having lost to Chelsea in 2021.

By the numbers

- Guardiola became the third manager to win 100 Champions League matches, after Ancelotti (107) and Alex Ferguson (102).
- The 4-0 result was the joint biggest margin of victory in a Champions League semifinal match, and Madrid's joint biggest defeat in any round of the competition.
- City's 31 goals in this season's Champions League is the club's biggest-ever tally in the competition.
- Silva became the third player to score two or more goals in a Champions League semifinal match against Madrid, after Lionel Messi and Robert Lewandowski.
- Jack Grealish created three chances for City, taking his Champions League tally for the season to 35 — the most of any player this term.

AGENCIES

Ancelotti admits Madrid outplayed

Carlo Ancelotti

Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti admitted his players were beaten by the better side as they suffered a painful 4-0 demolition at Manchester City on Wednesday that completed a 5-1 aggregate defeat in their Champions League semifinal.

City, who was beaten by Madrid at the same stage last season, avenged that heartbreaking defeat with a brilliant performance in front of their jubilant fans, with only Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois preventing it inflicting even more damage.

"They played better than us and deserved to win," Ancelotti admitted to reporters.

"They put a lot of pressure at the beginning, it worked out well for them because they made it very difficult for us to get the ball in play and they went two goals ahead.

"From then on, it was difficult to get back into the game. We tried in the second half... but it didn't work out."

Ancelotti admitted it was a painful night but said it was too soon to analyze what had gone wrong.

"Evaluating today, at this moment, makes no sense," he said.

"It is a defeat that hurts, it hurts a lot. But it can happen. We reached the semifinals of the Champions League against a strong opponent, they played better and left us without a final. We have to learn and for the next season, to be better."

A year after winning the Champions League and La Liga double, and becoming the first manager to capture titles in each of Europe's top five leagues, Ancelotti was facing up to finishing the campaign with just a Spanish Cup and the FIFA Club World Cup to show for his team's efforts.

He did, however, set another record on Wednesday, becoming the coach with the most European Cup games (191), surpassing the mark set by former Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson.

But with Madrid's rival Barcelona winning La Liga last weekend with four games to spare, Ancelotti was left searching for a silver lining.

"I think it was a good season. We have to show up in the few games we have ahead of us," Ancelotti said.

"I think that reaching a Champions League semifinal is a success because only four teams make it to the last four."

REUTERS

Silva savors 'beautiful night' after starring role in rout

MANCHESTER, United Kingdom — Bernardo Silva hailed Manchester City's "wonderful" 4-0 rout of Real Madrid as the treble-chaser booked a Champions League final showdown with Inter Milan.

Silva scored City's first two goals at the Etihad Stadium before Manuel Akanji and Julian Alvarez netted to cap a swaggering display from Pep Guardiola's side.

The Portugal midfielder was one of City's key figures as holder Madrid was ripped to shreds.

"It is a beautiful night for us. We knew it would be tough but to beat this Real Madrid team 4-0 at home was wonderful," Silva said.

"We know how tough Real are. They pushed us but we were very resilient, we were passionate but organized at the same time."

Silva said he was motivated to make amends for an underwhelming display in the 1-1 draw against Madrid in the first leg.

He fooled goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois with a sublime near-post finish to put City ahead in the 23rd minute and netted the second from close range eight minutes before halftime.

"My performance in the first game in Madrid was not the one I wanted and I wanted to compensate for that," he said.

"Today I had to do better for my teammates and the fans and that is what I tried to do. I am small but good with my head!"

Silva watched Inter's semifinal on television and expects a tough test from Simone Inzaghi's side, even though City will be the firm favorite in its second Champions League final appearance.

Bernardo Silva (right) celebrates scoring his first goal of the night with Manchester City teammates Erling Haaland (center) and Kyle Walker during Wednesday's 4-0 win over Real Madrid. AFP

"I watched their games, they look very strong and organized defensively. It will be tough but we will try. Hopefully we will win it," Silva said.

"The Premier League is another trophy we want to win with our fans again so we will look to recover before then."

Madrid defender Dani Carvajal admitted his team had no answers to City's relentless pressure.

"We played a rival who was better than us in this match. They pretty well overwhelmed us," he said.

"We can recognize that City was better. We were lacking something. It wasn't attitude we were lacking but we allowed ourselves to be pressed back too much.

"We knew that City was very strong at home but after the first leg we were left with the feeling that we could be better than this here, better on the ball."

With Barcelona winning the Spanish title this term, the Madrid squad faces an uncertain future that is likely to see boss Carlo Ancelotti depart, but Carvajal backed the 14-time European champion to bounce back next season.

"We are Madrid, we'll come back stronger and we'll work really hard next season to be back at this stage of the tournament," he said.

AFP